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ATHANASIUS AND THE NICENE CONTROVERSY

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## Chapter One

### The Origenist Background to the Controversy

It is frivolously interesting to speculate that had Origen's mother, according to one report, not hidden her seventeen year-<sup>1</sup>old son's clothes at one point during the year 203 A.D.<sup>1</sup>, Athanasius - Bishop of Alexandria from 325 - 373 - might never have become a subject worth treating upon in our own times. For the lad who, it is said, was too shy to embark naked upon the course of martyrdom he had set for himself then was to become the overbearing father of the controversy which led to Nicaea and, indeed, far beyond. The fact that the Nicene conflict has for too long been popularly held to have emanated from several divergent theological sources is at last, happily, a case of the hitherto murky pool in which the mud has finally settled to the bottom. For, as shall be seen, all of the major characters in the drama of the Eastern Church's fourth century trinitarian debate were of but one school of thought, and that one school was of Origen.

Origen was first and foremost a student of the Scriptures. But it must be held constantly in mind that he approached his subject of study as a well-schooled product of his culture and age. And that means that Origen read Holy Writ from the philosophic vantage point of Neo-Platonism.\* He held very firmly to

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\*For a fascinating and brief discussion of this issue, read Chadwick's "Philosophical Background" to the Contra Celsum (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1953)

to the Platonic maxim thatt nothing was to be believed of God which is unworthy of him.<sup>2,3</sup> So, it might well be expected of his exegetical method that it was to be tailored to the needs of certain contemporary, cosmological presuppositions. In fact, his so-called biblical theology was most precisely soteriological in its emphasis, rather than cosmological. But it was inevitable that the latter category would spill itself over into those definitions of terms necessary to the pursuit of his real purpose.

Origen held that there were three levels of Scriptural interpretation: literal, moral, and allegorical (or Spiritual)<sup>4</sup>. From such a schema he was able to devise a doctrine of God which was consistent both with the attestations of the Bible as he read them and with those prevailing philosophical truths he simply took for granted. For Origen, in his system of biblical study, had to come to terms with that notion of his times that "the whole visible order is a symbolic reflection of invisible realities."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, allegorization for him was no mere conceit for illuminating scripture by the device of fabled example, but rather the deadly serious business of fathoming an unseen but truly present existence.

God, he maintained, is the eternal Creator of the universe.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, He is the eternal Father of the Son, through whom the creation takes place.<sup>7</sup> Since the Father is always the Father, therefore the Son may be said to be co-eternal with Him. But this is not be imply a co-equality existing between

them. For while the Son is indeed the very expression of the Father's being - a perfect mirror of Him, so to speak, yet he is in a subordinate position because he is the image and not the original.<sup>8</sup> The Father alone is ἀγέννητος, that is, without generation, whereas the Son is eternally generated by Him.

The term ἀγέννητος as it is mentioned above in reference to Origen's conception of the Father, introduces us to the very nub of that problem which will follow us throughout this treatise. For God, who must be all-worthy, had to be disassociated from the transitory imperfections of the material order of things. The nature of things begotten was observed by the thinkers of those days to fall inevitably into corruption and decay with the passing of time. Naturally, then, that which was begotten was conceived to be inferior. And so the Father, by a process of negative attributions, was declared to be both ungenerated or unbegotten, i.e., ἀγέννητος and uncreated, i.e., ἀένητος.<sup>9</sup>

The similarity of these two terms is, of course, obvious. They both derive from the verb γίνεσθαι, that is - 'to become'. And as they looked similar, so in the history of their use they were often confused.<sup>10</sup> No trouble was to ensue as they were applied to the Father, for plainly they both were worthy of Him. But what about applying them to the Son?

Origen, as has been shown above, uses ἀγέννητος only with the Father. "Christ was not agennetos: He was the Son of the Father; was he therefore to be reckoned among geneta?"<sup>11</sup> This is the crucial question. And it is in answer to it that the real

issue of subordinationism raises its head. Consider the root derivation of *γένημα*, which in itself means 'product,' 'fruit', or 'yield of vegetables', and it becomes abundantly clear just how severe the ramifications of subordinationism become when they are applied to the nature of the Son.\*

It has been argued that Origen did apply *γέννητος* to the Son.<sup>12</sup> If so, He was indeed considered to be a lower thing, but this in a highly specialized way. For He is also plainly assumed to be first in the hierarchy of created things, together with the Spirit "in a class in which their full apprehension of God is unquestionable."<sup>13</sup>

But this disputed application of mere creatureliness to the Word appears to be confounded in the second of the catena fragments on St. John (Preuschen's edition), wherein Origen, in fact, would seem to deny that very assertion.<sup>14</sup> He holds here that those things which 'come to be' are made alive only by participation in the Word. And life did not come upon Him, but rather "in Him was life" (John 1:4).<sup>15</sup> So, in a very real way the Logos is not creaturely as are other things created, for He is always Life begotten by Life.<sup>16</sup>

As Origen sees it, therefore, the Word is in a special sense truly *genetos* (derivative). He is so "because He is not Himself the source and origin of that being, but derives it from the Father."<sup>17</sup>

What then, we must ask, is His essential relationship to

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\*This example was suggested to me by the Rev. Dr. L. S. Patterson, Assistant Professor of Church History at E.T.S.

the Father? It is as if He were light, claims Origen, light emanating from that torch which is the God-head.<sup>18</sup>

Is this, then, to imply that Father and Son are ὁμοούσιος, i.e. of one substance? There is considerable debate among patristic scholars as to whether Origen, in fact, used this very term. Some would hold that he did, citing Pamphilus' alleged quotation from the now lost Commentary on Hebrews as their defense.<sup>19,20</sup> Others are more skeptical, on the grounds that no other extant work of Origen employs the word and that the passage in question would appear to be itself of doubtful origin.<sup>21</sup> One thing seems sure: It appears certain by the very imagery of his torch/light metaphor that Origen believed that the Son is in some sense derivative of the same essential nature which constitutes the Father.

But on the other hand, Origen was keenly aware of the dangers implicit in such a notion. It was too easy to misconstrue this concept into an affirmation of Monarchianism. And so he was very careful about qualifying it. While it must remain an open question as to whether he believed that the Son shared in the οὐσία of the Father, it is altogether plain that he believed the God-head to be comprised of three, distinct ὑποστάσεις, or persons.<sup>22</sup> Synonyms, Origen could use these two words in order to describe quite separate phenomena. The difficulty of reading him now is that he was not possessed of any notion of *distinguishing* between them. In his view, in any case, the Son is "other in subsistence than the Father."<sup>23</sup> As



he says in the Contra Celsum:

They are two distinct existences, but one in mental unity, in agreement, and in identity of will.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever the state of their substantial relationship, then, the Father and Son are seen to be united as distinct, separate personae only at the point of mind and will. And Origen is not afraid to go so far as to revive Justin Martyr's terms, <sup>referring</sup> to the Son as *ὁ δεύτερος θεός*, the second God, for the Father alone is ingenerate while the Son is begotten by Him.<sup>25</sup>

Observe the inconsistencies in these formulations. Philosophically-speaking, He who is *ἡ ἀγέννητος* alone is God. Origen grants this, but yet, as a student of Scriptures, he is constrained to defend the divinity of two other *ὑποστάσεις* if he is to avoid the error of Monarchianism. So, the Word and Spirit are claimed for the God-head in direct transgression of any logical conclusion to be drawn from the prior philosophical assertion. Moreover, his Subordinationist defense for Word and Spirit is erratically conceived, and the way is left wide open for inevitable subsequent confusion. For who may perfectly comprehend that *ὁ δεύτερος θεός* shares in the one nature of *ὁ θεός*?

Still, the works of Origen were monumental for their times. They represented the first complete theological system which had attempted to synthesize the religion of revelation with the cosmology of a particular age.<sup>26</sup> And as such, it was to have lingering importance in all theological disputations to follow in the next succeeding century. *In* point of fact, those

variant schools of theological speculation, which were to clash so violently during the shaky (if lengthy) episcopate of Athanasius, would all claim Origen as an authority for their respective positions.

As is so often the case, perhaps as it is most generally recognized with regard to the reformers of 16th and 17th Century Europe, those who were to claim discipleship from this theological master were also to distort his views as they proclaimed them for their own. Just as Calvin's interpreters exaggerated certain aspects of his thought in the rise of delineated Calvinist schools, so, too, Origen's followers were to create distinct Origenist parties as a consequence of their variant emphases upon parts of his doctrine. Those most concerned with the soteriological issue were marked by a primary attention to the defense of the full and essential divinity of the Son. But there were also those most involved in articulating the nature of the Godhead in terms precisely consistent with the age's prevailing cosmology. And these were altogether wary that the definition of the Son should not impinge upon their solutions.

Broadly speaking, the soteriologists have been called the Right-Wing Origenists. Among these men are to be grouped Gregory Thaumaturgas (the Wonder-Worker), Peter of Alexandria, and Alexander of Alexandria,<sup>27</sup> the latter man being the bishop who deposed Arius and under whom Athanasius served as personal secretary.

Alexander's thought may serve here as a brief example of a conservative Origenists' point of view.\* As did Origen, he made a distinction between the hypostatic natures of the Father and the Son. The Son was conceived to be the mediating force between the Father and Creation. Alexander granted that the Father is alone ingenerate, but he staunchly maintained that the Son is not, therefore, a creature, but that, rather, he is derived from the Father's very being. And, he declared, the Son is, in fact, co-eternal with the Father, for there could never be a time when He was without His Word. Hedging, perhaps, on the matter of substantial co-equality, Alexander asserted that a perfect 'likeness' (*ὁμοιότης*) exists between them.

An example of Left-wing, radical Origenist thinking may be seen in a capsuled rehearsal of the tenets of the Church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea.\*\* As was typical of this school, he began with the statement of the proposition that God is one (See Arius, MSS. p.13). Therefore, since the Son is a distinct hypostasis, albeit begotten before all ages, he is not even co-eternal with the Father. Indeed, the Son came along before all ages, i.e. time as we know it, but there was a time before the times when he was not (Cf. Arius, MSS., p.13). For, as all conceded, the Father alone is ingenerate and therefore

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\*That which follows is derived from Early Christian Doctrines, J. N. D. Kelly (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), pp. 224-225

\*\*Ibid., pp. 225, 226.

must precede the Son, whose existence is due solely to the Will of the Father. Moreover, Eusebius is so bold as to make the explicit statement that the Father and Son do not share in a common essence. Rather, he claims, their unity ~~as~~ distinct hypostases is to be found only in their sharing of a common glory.

This chapter must now turn its course to deal directly with the threshold of Arianism. And such a turning leads us first, as a preliminary to the problem of the person and teaching of Lucian of Antioch.

In a letter to his friend Eusebius of Nicomedia, written ca. 318 A.D., Arius makes the following remarks:

--We are persecuted because we say, "The Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning." For this we are persecuted, and because we say, "He is (made) out of things that were not." But this is what we say, since he is neither a part of God nor (formed) out of any substratum. For this we are persecuted, and you know the rest. So I pray that you may prosper in the Lord, remembering our afflictions, fellow Lucianist, truly Eusebius.<sup>28</sup>

Who was this Lucian of whom Arius and Eusebius were proud to proclaim they were followers? It has popularly been held that he fell heir to the theological stance of the deposed heretic, Paul of Samosata, who was an Adoptionist Monarchian.<sup>29</sup> Paul's own particular view entailed the making of a distinction between Jesus Christ (*Ψιλὸς ἄνθρωπος*, i.e., mere man) and the

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\*The category of 'glory' is one used by Origen in a very different sense, in connection with "the effluence of the [ ] Almighty, \_\_\_\_\_ (an illustration suggesting) a community of Substance between Father and Son." See Early Christian Doctrines, op.cit., p. 130.

Word. The former is 'one' (*ἕνα*) and from below, while the latter is 'other' (*ἄλλος*) and from above.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, as the historical figure of Jesus is distinct from the Word, so also, in Paul's thinking, is the Word distinct from the *λόγος*. He saw the *λόγος* as the reason or wisdom of God, an attributive part of the deity's nature.<sup>31</sup> But the Word itself he took merely to be an impersonal power, the commandment or ordinance of God, which descended upon Christ and which claimed him for the divine purpose.<sup>32</sup> Jesus, maintained Paul, is united with God only at the juncture of Will, and he became God *ἐκ προκοπῆς*, that is - 'out of advancement', from the sinfulness of his condition as man by a progression to the state of perfection.<sup>33</sup>

The question to be asked now, on the face of this cursory glance at Paul of Samosata, is just how much of his thought was actually transferred into the teachings of Lucian, those teachings which theoretically gave rise to Arianism proper? Even today's rare advocates of an Antiochene grounding for this heresy are skeptical.

The affinity between Paul and the Lucianist Arius on the subject of distinguishing between the *λόγος* and the Son is both obvious and misleading. For both men the former term refers to an attribute of God, while the latter word represents something entirely different and posterior to it,<sup>34</sup> The assertion may be made, therefore, that the roots of such delineation may well spring from the soil of Antioch.<sup>35</sup>

But - and this is a point to be well taken, the biblical monotheism underlying Paul's statement of the proposition is a very different thing indeed from Arius' own philosophical presumptions about the God-head.<sup>36</sup> For Arius, unlike the alleged teacher of his teacher, it was a necessary corollary to Creation to assume that God had employed an intermediary agent in order to bring the event off. So, while he did, in fact, dehypostasize the *logos*, relegating it, as has been said previously, to the status of a divine attribute, he employed the Son in a manner most uncharacteristic of Paul, by positing him in the role of this pre-existent agent of Creation.<sup>37</sup> And by harking to the line which includes such a mediatorial figure as the pre-requisite to the founding of the world, the celebrated pupil of Lucian here demonstrates himself to be a fellow of the Origenist cosmological persuasion. Such is more characteristically Alexandrian that it is Antiochene.<sup>38</sup>

It is no wonder, then, that most careful scholars are dubious as to the advisability of tracing Arianism from a bifurcated line stemming from both Paul of Samosata and Lucian of Antioch. But the question still remains, therefore: Who was this Lucian?

It is interesting to note that, aside from a disputed testimony of Alexander of Alexandria, there is no real evidence extant which inculpates Lucian of Antioch with Monarchianism or with any brand of heresy whatsoever.<sup>39</sup> To the contrary, it is remarkable to observe that his character seems

never to be questioned in the writings of his contemporaries and that the Second Creed of Antioch (341 A.D.), which has been attributed to his influence, is really quite orthodox in its denunciation of Sabellianism.<sup>40</sup> and by its tangentially anti-Arian tone.<sup>41</sup> As a matter of fact, the theory which makes the best sense out of Alexander's linking of Lucian with Paul is the identification of the former with someone entirely different from the 'Martyr of Antioch'. That is to say, Alexander's Lucian, the successor of Paul of Samosata, is not really Lucian of Antioch at all, but rather just another Monarchian Adoptionist.<sup>42</sup>

Lucian of Antioch, the master of Arius, is best conceived to be a member of the Left-Wing Origenist school.<sup>43</sup> And it is to this very source that we must look if we are to correctly grasp the issues of Arius and Arianism as they are subsequently thrown into the arena against Athanasius.

Arius' primary theological concern was that of being consistent with the cosmology of his day. As we have just observed, he learned his trade from one who it must be presumed taught him chiefly from Origen. And Arius' heresy was most precisely the result of his carrying Origen's philosophical presuppositions about the nature of the God-head to their logical conclusion.

In brief, then, Arius' thoughts were these.\* As is to be expected, he began with the familiar assertion that God

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\*The following resumé of Arius' theologizing is derived from Early Christian Doctrines, op.cit., pp. 226-231.

is one and is alone ingenerate. But as Origen hedged on the issue in order to try to be consistent with Scripture, Arius pursued it now with a one-track vengeance. If God is one and alone ingenerate, then He is alone eternal, alone without beginning, alone true, etc. And what is more, he said, it is obvious that the essence of His uniqueness cannot be shared, for if it can be shared it can be divided, and that which can be divided is subject to change, and that which can be changed cannot be God. So, in Arius' estimation, all other things which are specifically not *ἀγέννητος* must, in fact, be created - and that out of nothing.

Therefore, it would follow that while Arius held the firmly orthodox conviction that the *λόγος* is, indeed, the Father's organ of Creation and cosmic activity, nevertheless He is to be considered as one not self-existent, as a creature ex nihilo in the final analysis. And from such a position, who may dispute the reasonableness of Arius' conclusions about the Word? For if He is a creature, He cannot be eternal. Certainly it is true that the sphere of time as men live it was created through Him, and so He undeniably pre-exists the world of men. But if the Word is, in fact, a creature, then there was some time before the ages in which He was not. And this was to become the very battle cry of the Arians and of their occasional allies: "There was when He was not"!

Because Arius contended that the Word is a creature, called into being out of nothing by the Father's will in a



time before the times, it was logical for him to assume, quite contrary to the thinking of Origen, that there is no direct knowledge of the Father inherent in the Son. Certainly, given Arius' guiding principles, any direct communion existing between these two persons is unthinkable. And as all creatures are subject to change, so, likewise, is the Word thus defined and even to the extent that He is held liable to sin.

Plainly, then, the Word is called 'Son' within the traditio of the Church purely for honorific purposes. For what He really amounts to, in Arius' view, is a demi-god, a creature brought into being by the will of the Father in order to deal with the materiality of an imperfect creation which should not be directly attributed to the God-head. Arius notion of the Trinity, therefore, was that it is comprised of three totally different beings, none of whom co-inhere in the substance of the others.

It is significant that Arius' first difficulties with episcopal authority stemmed not from his doctrinal position but rather from an unsavory political alignment. In or around the year 306 A.D., during a lull in the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian, a schism was effected in the Church by Melitius, the Bishop of Lycopolis.<sup>44</sup> Bishop Melitius had objected to Bishop Peter of Alexandria's lenient terms for the return of the lapsed. As a consequence of his objections and trouble-making, Melitius was excommunicated by Peter and so also was Arius, who had sided in the dispute with him.<sup>45</sup>

Though Arius was later reconciled to Achillas, who succeeded Peter to the See of Alexandria, his earlier political associations with the Melitian schismatics were to yield him useful allies during the theological war-fare of later times.

The subject of the actual events leading up to Nicaea constitute more than sufficient matter and controversy for a separate treatise in itself. This is not the place for its detailed consideration. In very simple terms then, the first of the great ecumenical councils was occasioned by the command of the Emperor Constantine, for the purpose of ending strife within his realm's new official religion.

Arius, once deposed as deacon by Peter and then later restored and ordained priest by Achillas, was once again deposed in 320 or 321 by Alexander, this time on charges of heresy.<sup>46</sup> Citing from a report of this later action, the record of his deposition is as follows:

--Since then our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has instructed us by His own mouth (an allusion to a previous quotation of Luke 21:8), and also hath signified to us by the Apostle concernin such men (see I Timothy 4:7), we accordingly being personal witnesses of their impiety, have anathematized, as we said, all such, and declared them to be alien from the Catholic Faith and Church.<sup>47</sup>

This writ was signed not only by Alexander himself but also by the presbyters and deacons of Alexandria and Mareotis. Two of the diaconal signatures from Alexandria read 'Athanasius'. He who had signed first of these two was the man who was later to fall heir both to the See of Alexandria and to the consequences of the enmity provoked by this deposition.<sup>48</sup> And

perhaps it is not insignificant to ~~note~~ here that, in the opinion of many scholars, the deposition was most likely written by this self-same Athanasius.<sup>49</sup>

Arius may have been officially disbarred from his office, but he was far from finished as regards the weight of his influence throughout the Church. He derived great support for his views, both from his own parish at Bauchalis in Alexandria and from several sources outside the diocese.<sup>50</sup> Chief among his 'foreign' supporters was Eusebius, one-time Bishop of Berytus, and lately translated to Nicomedia -- from whence he most generally derives his identification amongst students today. Eusebius called together a council at Bethynia, in or near Nicomedia, in order to acclaim and to endorse the theological stance of his 'fellow' Lucianist' (see MSS, p.4).<sup>51</sup> This council drafted and sent to many bishops letters approving Arius' views, and it also urged of Alexander that he rescind the deposition.<sup>52</sup> As the lines of battle began to take form, rioting broke out in the streets of Alexandria,<sup>53</sup> and a great unrest settled over the East.

Needless to say, the Emperor Constantine was not a little disturbed about the prospects of a civil war within the very religion to which he had so recently submitted his empire. He had hoped to bolster the domestic tranquillity by such a submission, and instead he was faced almost immediately with imminent strife. Actually, it seems certain that the recognition of the Church was a fundamental cause of the controversy

itself. For the view-points which were now being openly contended had undoubtedly long been in existence, kept quietly under wraps until such time as the persecuted Church could afford the luxury of disputing them. Such luxury was provided by the event of Constantine's fortuitous recognition.

In any case, he dispatched Ossius, Bishop of Cordova, to Alexandria in October of 324, and with him he sent a letter from his own hand urging both parties to make peace over such a trivial matter.<sup>54</sup> The question of heresy was a small thing indeed in relation to the question of preserving law and order. But the letter was to no real avail, for neither party could understand Constantine's notion that the issues were unimportant.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Alexander was quite upset, and justifiably so, that the emperor had seen fit to deal with Arius as his equal in the issue.<sup>56</sup>

So, with nothing really substantially resolved - and probably at the suggestion of Ossius,<sup>57</sup> Constantine decided to summon a council comprised of bishops from the whole world to decide the thing once and for all at Nicaea. A statement of belief normative to the Church thus-gathered was written and was signed as being binding upon all the faithful. It reads as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty,  
maker of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God,  
begotten (γεννηθέντα) from the Father, only-  
begotten (μονογενῆ), that is, from the substance  
(οὐσίας) of the Father, God from God, light from  
light, true God from true God, begotten not made  
(γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα), of one substance (ὁμο-  
ούσιον) with the Father, through Whom all things

came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead;

And in the Holy Spirit.

But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and, Before being born He was not, and that He came into being out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or Substance (*οὐσίας*), or is created (*κτισθέν*), or is subject to alteration or change - these the Catholic Church anathematizes.<sup>58</sup>

It is obvious from the terminology used in this formulary that its devisers were thorough-going Origenists. With the likely exception of the composite term *ὁμοούσιον* about which more shall be said shortly, the definitive words of this creed come directly from the thought of Origen. They represented for the moment a victory by one Origenist persuasion over another Origenist persuasion. And on the surface, it would appear that the victory was an over-whelming one.

But it was no such thing. And the question which is of immediate concern is 'why?' For observe the extent to which Arius' definition of the relationship of the Son to the Father is seemingly spurned. The first notable phrase of confutation is contained in the words

"That is, from the substance of the Father."

This is a deliberate counter-reply to the most basic of Arian assertions, i.e., ~~that is~~ that the Son is created out of nothing and has no communion with the Father.<sup>59</sup> And this theme was

perhaps intended to be further elaborated on by the subsequent usage of ὁμοούσιον, implying by one interpretation, a continuity of divine essence between Father and Son. In fact, Arius' Thalia, that poetic setting of his doctrine, had explicitly stated:

"He is not equal to Him (the Father), nor for that matter of the same substance (ὁμοούσιον)..."<sup>60</sup>

And again, in the words

"True God from True God"

an Arian notion, that is - of the Son's essential demi-divine nature, is specifically refuted.<sup>61</sup>

Moreover,

"Begotten not made"

was a phrase calculated to break the back of the argument that there existed no real difference between the categories of 'being begotten' and 'being made'. The point being stressed here is "that it is nonsense to talk of God being subjected to necessity if His very nature (is) to beget".<sup>62</sup> Contrary to Arius' thinking, God the Father did not NEED to create the Son in order to bring about Creation, but rather begot Him because it is His very nature to do so.

The creed itself would seem to be a weighty enough rejection of Arian tenet. But the anathemas affixed to the credo-proper provided an additional denunciation. 'Every one of the phrases singled out therein for condemnation were typical Arian slogans and most of them were derived from Arius' Thalia.<sup>63</sup>

What now of the much disputed term, *ὁμοούσιον*? Where does it figure in the controversy and why does it do so? The issue has already been raised that it is of dubious Origenist origination (see MSS. p.5 and p.6). Likewise, the theory that it is only of Ossius' suggestion - and thereby of purely Western antecedence<sup>64</sup> - must be discarded.

In its root sense, *ὁμοούσιον* is not a theological term at all. It means simply 'made of the same stuff'. And such was its uncomplicated significance in popular Stoic usage of the times.<sup>65</sup>

But 'stuff', of course, has its generic sense, for no two objects of material substance are composed of the self-same portions of matter, but rather are of the same 'kind of stuff'.<sup>66</sup> Thus, in an early use it was taken as a synonym for *homogenes*, i.e., 'belonging to the same genus'.<sup>67</sup> If Origen did ever employ the word, it was in this way, namely - that what the Father is, so also is the Son, but this without reference to the real problem of unity between them. For everyone knows that an off-spring is 'homogeneous' with its parent.<sup>68</sup> In Aristotelian terms, such usage, alluding to universals, referred to 'secondary substance' (*δευτέρα οὐσία*).<sup>69</sup>

But there was another major meaning also. Aristotle's 'primary substance' (*πρώτη οὐσία*) entailed an understanding of it as being at one "with a particular entity regarded as the subject of qualities."<sup>70</sup> This rendering had wide-spread use during the patristic era.<sup>71</sup>

It is plain to see, even at such a cursory glance, that *ὁμοούσιον* was a term full of ambiguity. And so, it may be presumed, was it thus intended when it was suggested to the Council by the first Christian Roman Emperor.<sup>72</sup> Again he strove on the side of attempting to insure peace at the expense of coming to terms with the truth. *Ὁμοούσιον* was not only ambiguous, but moreover it hitherto had the conscious allegiance of no single party represented at Nicaea.<sup>73</sup> Such was Constantine's strategy, that men might make of it what they would and thereby restore order to his disturbed empire.

I have said that Nicaea represented no victory over the heresiarch Arius. Indeed, it did not. For while Constantine lived, a shuddering quiet prevailed, quivering under accessions made to the Nicene formulary which shared few points of common agreement. The immediate aftermath of Nicaea was the proverbial lull before the storm. For the vagueness of Origen and the confusion of *ὁμοούσιον* were to thunder out their consequences on yet another, more ferocious, plain of strife. And it will be there that we must proceed to examine the life and thought of a new bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius by name.



## CHAPTER TWO

### ATHANASIUS' LIFE

What evil consequences are produced in every day  
by the tumult of envy which has been stirred up  
amongst you!

--Constantine, Maximus, Augustus, to the  
people of the Catholic Church at Alexandria.  
Apologia Contra Arianos IV, 61.

On April 17, 328 A.D., Alexander - Bishop of Alexandria  
and supreme pastor of all Egypt, lay dying upon his bed.  
According to one report,<sup>1</sup> he repeatedly called out for his  
personal secretary, the young, thirty-two year-old deacon  
named Athanasius. But that Athanasius, unhappily, was not in  
the city. In his stead, another deacon of the same name (see  
Chapter One, MSS. p. 15), approached the side of the old pon-  
tiff. Alexander, in his weak state, took no notice of the  
difference. In a quavering voice, he is alleged to have said:  
"You think to escape, but it cannot be."

If one is to give credence to the events of this little  
drama, he might do well to ask of the significance of Alexander's  
words. For what would it be that Athanasius 'thought to escape'?  
Perhaps it was succession to the cathedra of Alexandria. Or  
maybe, in the broader sense, it was succession to the leader-  
ship of a party's theological interests. But in any event,  
if such things he feared, such things indeed he could not es-  
cape. And the record of history as to how he carried out these  
endeavors makes one marvel at the tale that he was ever reluc-  
tant to enter upon them.

Who was Athanasius? The facts are misleadingly simple at the outset. Apparently the son of wealthy and prestigious parents in Alexandria, he was a product of classical formal education there and learned his theology in the Right-Wing Origenist persuasion of his benefactor, Bishop Alexander (see Chapter One, MSS. p. 6)<sup>2</sup> He was to accede to the episcopate of Alexandria and the Primacy of all Egypt, to earn for himself - as a result of his staunch opposition to the complex of so-called 'Arians' - the title of 'the pillar of the Church' from Gregory of Nazianzus,<sup>3</sup> to suffer in exile five times during the term of his administration, and finally to die of old age eight years before the Council of Constantinople.

That he was a politician par excellence is beyond dispute. "His spiritual home," as is maintained by von Campenhausen, "was the divine service and the clerical administration of the Church."<sup>4</sup> His task, as he saw it, was the defense of the integrity of the One Body of Christ, and he was not one to compromise on the issue of that integrity, not even - and perhaps not especially, to the emperors themselves.

Conceivably, as has often been maintained, this is the real clue to Athanasius' person, that he was nothing save a skillful politician. However, such an argument presupposes as its corollary that the man's theology was merely a dull, blunt weapon of defense.<sup>5</sup>

But was it only this? Was he concerned at all with the real issues of the debate of his times, or only with the phenomenon of the debate itself? Was he merely an ecclesiastical

Constantine, devoted primarily to maintaining unity and that regardless of the questions at stake? Or was he, on the contrary, a man with a real doctrinal axe to wield, a <sup>man truly involved in the search for a</sup> Creation, <sup>meaning to</sup> in the search for a way to relate one's view of God to history?

This is the enigma of St. Athanasius, and it is to this point in the problem of the man that this treatise must direct itself. The answer to these questions may not justly be derived from any one, so-called 'representative' work of his, but rather must be sought instead among the confusing strands of his developing life. And the chief problem to be overcome in the conduct of this search for the 'real' Athanasius is the fact that the large portion of his major writings represent only about six years in his forty-five year episcopate, a little less than one-thirteenth of his total life.

Yet, a beginning must be made. Allusion has already been made to the argument that Athanasius figured early, while still a deacon, in his predecessor's dispute with Arius (see Chapter One, MSS. p. 16). Indeed, the contention that he may have authored the Depositio Arianorum seems to gain in credibility in the light of the following fragment from the Encyclical Letter of the Council of Egypt:\*

--Eusebius (of Nicomedia) and his fellows, who are the disciples of (Arian)' impiety, considering themselves also to have been ejected (by the deposition),

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\*338-339. An assembly of "nearly one hundred of (Egypt's) bishops" (Athanasius, "Introduction" to Apologia Contra Arianos, the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, op.cit., p. 100) convoked for Athanasius' defense.

wrote frequently to Bishop Alexander, of blessed memory, beseeching him not to leave the heretic Arius out of the Church. But when Alexander in his piety towards Christ refused to admit that impious man, they directed their resentment against Athanasius, who was then a Deacon, because in their busy inquiries they had heard that he was much in the familiarity of Bishop Alexander; and much honored by him.<sup>6</sup>

Reading between the lines here, it seems perfectly clear that the 'familiarity' of Alexander with his deacon-secretary was one not merely of friendship, but moreover that of collaboration between fellow strategists. Looking ahead to Athanasius' role in the controversy-continued, it is doubtful that early attacks upon him were the peripheral result of his friendship with a detested old man. The point is that Athanasius was believed by his enemies to have somehow been involved in crafting that which was detestable in the then Bishop of Alexandria. It would seem altogether likely, in fact, that Athanasius not only drafted the Depositio Arian, but that also his was the concern motivating his master's on the entire Arian issue.

It was an old Alexander who wrote as follows to his brother-bishop in Constantinople on the dangers of Arianism:

And we, indeed, though we discovered rather late, on account of their concealment, their manner of life, and their unholy attempts, by the common suffrage of all have cast them forth from the congregation of the Church which adores the God-head of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

"---We discovered rather late...". The words are almost apologetic in their context, sprung from the pen of an aged bishop who knew that he had lost touch with a sizeable portion of his flock. It would seem that it may reasonably be conjectured

that it was Athanasius who became his eyes and ears in his later life. As Gwatkin asserts, "---Alexander was slow to move, needing perhaps to be stirred up by younger men...".<sup>8</sup>

It is common knowledge that Alexander attended the Council of Nicaea. Not only is his signature attached to its Creed, but moreover it is a matter of record that he was much involved in the Melitian 'settlement' inaugurated there. In opposition to his own views, the Melitians (see Chapter One, MSS. p.14) were promised full recognition of their orders if their bishops would cease to function as such in favor of those consecrated by Alexander himself.<sup>9</sup>

But I have been unable to find report anywhere of his direct involvement in the disputation with the Arians at the Council. Such involvement there may have been, for in spite of his slowness in dealing with them initially, one may not doubt his sincere interest and concern with regard to the problem they posed.

And yet, out of the silence resultant of a lack of specific information including him in these debates, there arises an exciting contrast for Athanasius in the simple words of this ancient sentence:

And (Arian) hatred of (Athanasius) was greatly increased after they had experience of his piety towards Christ, in the Council assembled at Nicaea, wherein he spoke boldly against the impiety of (those) madmen.<sup>10</sup>

The above-cited is derived from the same Encyclical Letter of the Council of Egypt that the report of Athanasius' earlier disfavor is quoted from (see MSS. pp.24-25). As a matter of fact,

it is the passage immediately following it. The story seems clear and its chapters contiguous: Arius and his followers could look to Athanasius as being, in large part, both the instigator and the perpetuator of their troubles with officialdom. It is, therefore, not surprising that the very event of Athanasius' consecration to the episcopate should not be too early an event to occasion a major attack by them against his new authority.

Bishop Alexander, during his own years of presidency over the Church in Alexandria, had decreed a new method of procedure for the selection of his episcopal successors. The electoral prerogatives of the diocesan presbyters for such an event were completely overthrown.<sup>11</sup> As it has already been observed; with regard to the self-sufficiency of a condemned Arius resting at ease and in power at Bauchalis (see Chapter One. MSS. p.16), the prerogatives of the Alexandrian presbyters were alarmingly strong and certainly threatening to the furtherance of established hierarchical orders among clergy. So, the priests were denied of their precedented right to have a say in the matter of who their chief pastor was to be. Instead, the Spirit of such decision was called to descend only upon the other bishops of the Egyptian See.<sup>12</sup> The event of Athanasius' election is reported by these bishops later in the following words:

Now that the whole multitude and all the people of the Catholic Church (in Alexandria) assembled together as with one mind and body, and creed, shouted, that Athanasius should be Bishop of their Church, made

this the subject of their public prayers to Christ, and conjured us to grant it for many days and nights, neither departing themselves from the Church, nor suffering us to do so; of all this we are witnesses, and so is the whole city, and the province too.\_\_\_\_ And that he was elected by a majority of our body in the sight and with the acclamations of all the people, we who elected him also testify\_\_\_\_.<sup>13</sup>

On the face of the above, the election would appear to be an open and shut case. But the report is a little too neat and tidy as it stands. For what is to be made of the following allegation?

After the death of Bishop Alexander, a certain few having mentioned the name of Athanasius, six or seven Bishops elected him clandestinely in a secret place:\_\_\_\_<sup>14</sup>

Such is reputed to be the Eusebian charge against the validity of his claims to office. And there is another factor to consider: Alexander died April 17, 328 while Athanasius was not consecrated until June 8th of the same year.<sup>15</sup> There was very nearly a two month interval between these events. What was going on in the meantime?

It is likely that both descriptions of the election are a bit slanted, since both of them proceed from polemical sources. Lietzmann's solution to the question seems plausible:<sup>16</sup> As was asserted by the Athanasians, a good number of Egyptian bishops did assemble for the purpose of electing a leader, but most probably, due to their own ambitions, they were slow in coming to the crucial vote. Perhaps, as is also asserted in the Athanasian statement, the crowds were unruly and persistent in their demands that a new Pope of Alexandria be selected.

In any case, tiring of the lengthy debate amongst their fellows, six or seven bishops got together, as is reported in the Eusebian charge, and elected and consecrated Athanasius.

For Athanasius, the matter should have been settled, as he received full recognition from the Emperor Constantine. But because of the substantial irregularities implicit in his coming ~~this~~ to office, the very event of his elevation came to rest among a pile of weapons being collected by his enemies for the ultimate purpose of knocking him down.

Who were Athanasius' enemies? There were, of course, the Arians-proper, who not only differed with the bishop on affairs of doctrine, but who moreover, despised him for his role in the deposition of Arius and for his open hostility to them at Nicaea. But there were others also. The issue has been greatly confused by the Athanasian tendency to label all its opposition 'Arian'.\* Eusebius of Nicomedia, as has already been observed (see MSS. pp. 18<sup>24</sup> and 16), was listed as such. But Eusebius was no real Arian. In fact, he was usually critical of Arianism.<sup>17</sup> Aside from the fact that he was also opposed to the implications of the *ὁμοούσιον* in the Nicene settlement, he shared not even the terms for its correction with the disciples of Arius. No, Eusebius was anti-Athanasian

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\*An apt contemporary analogy to this state of affairs is the tendency of America's ultra-conservatives to hang upon all their own various and varying foes the single epithet 'Communist'.



because he was a left-wing Origenist, and because he therefore held to a more radical view of the subsistent relationship of the Son to the Father than did his foe. And it seems likely that Eusebius truly was disturbed over the suspicious machinations attributed to Athanasius' election. Moreover, into the ranks of the Arian-Eusebian 'enemy' marched those old political-intriguers, the Melitians (see Chapter One, MSS, p. 14). Recall that according to the dictates of Nicaea the Melitian bishops were directed to cease functioning as such in favor of those consecrated by Alexander (see MSS. p. 76). Melitius himself had been forced to withdraw to Lycopolis and had been instructed to cease his ordinations.<sup>18</sup> But Melitius, according to the Early Church historian, Sozomen, took it upon himself, as he lay dying, to appoint a successor to his episcopate, a man by the name of John.<sup>19</sup> It can well be imagined the reaction this evoked from Alexander's successor. Open schismatic enmity was resumed in Alexandria between the Melitians and Athanasius.

Who were Athanasius' enemies? They were the Arians, the Eusebians, and the Melitians, all lumped together in Athanasius' view as being Arians, all lumped together in their own dissimilar views as being those who would profit in common from the removal of Alexandria's pro-Nicene, anti-Melitian bishop.

It was the Melitians who first brought things to a head. They charged before Constantine that Athanasius was "the author of all the seditions and troubles that agitated the Church\_\_\_\_."<sup>20</sup>

Specifically, they alleged that he had tried to bribe a messenger of the emperor and that he had been guilty of sacrilege in the matter of a certain presbyter named Ischyrras.<sup>21</sup> Constantine summoned Athanasius to answer these charges. It is likely that Constantine was already somewhat put out by his new Bishop of Alexandria. Just previous to the event of the Melitian charges being presented to him, the emperor had written to Athanasius, upon the bidding of Eusebius of Nicomedia, in order to remind him that Arius had been pardoned\* and was to be readmitted to the Church. An extract from this letter, preserved by Athanasius himself, reads as follows:

(You) having therefore knowledge of my will, grant free admission to all who wish to enter into the Church. For if I learn that you have hindered or excluded any who claim to be admitted into communion with the Church, I will immediately send someone who shall depose you by my command, and shall remove you from your place.<sup>22</sup>

But Athanasius steadfastly refused to do as he was bidden. Such is an extremely early example of the Church insisting upon the autonomy of her own rights with regard to intra-Secclesiastical matters. Athanasius was fortunate that Constantine's reaction was merely a biding of time,<sup>23</sup> but that biding of time was a silence perhaps interpreted as precedent by many who looked on and by some who would remember.

Athanasius appeared as directed at the royal Villa Psamathia, near Nicomedia, at about the turn of the year's 331-332.<sup>24</sup>

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\*In 327, at a second assembly of Nicaea, during which Arius assented to the Creed of 325. "From Constantine to Julian", op. cit. (see Notes), p.124.

He straight way set upon the conduct of an ultimately successful defense. The allegation concerning the attempted bribe was swiftly swept aside. As for the matter of sacrilege committed against the presbyter Ischyrras, the substance of its claim entailed a report that a chalice had been broken by a legate of Athanasius. This legate, likewise a presbyter and named Macarius, had been dispatched to Mareotis by the bishop to seize Ischyrras.<sup>25</sup> Athanasius' contention was that Ischyrras was no true priest at all, for he had been ordained by Colluthius, himself merely a priest.<sup>26</sup> Since, therefore, Ischyrras was no true presbyter, argued Athanasius,

How then can it be believed that a private person, occupying a private house, had in his possession a sacred chalice?<sup>27</sup>

The charge was absurd, or so at least the Bishop of Alexandria contended. And so, in fact, the Emperor was led to believe. In 332, Athanasius, for the moment vindicated, returned to Egypt.

For a short period, an uneasy peace prevailed. Arius once again incurred the wrath of Constantine and once again placated him by a public recitation of seemingly orthodox beliefs.<sup>28</sup> The sun of royal favor appeared to shine equally upon both sides of the controversy for most of the remainder of the year and on into 333.<sup>29</sup>

But Melitian intriguing could not long remain still. John, Melitius' successor (see p.30 ), accused Athanasius of being responsible for the murder of a bishop named Arsenius.<sup>30</sup> But

the plot collapsed ridiculously when Athanasius produced Arsenius very much alive. The Athanasian beshops in Egypt later described the event with bitter, but no less genuine humor:

--If it had been possible, (the Meletians) would have transported (Arsenius, for purposes of concealing him) to another world, nay, or have taken him from life in earnest, so that either by true or false statement of his murder they might in good earnest destroy Athanasius. But thanks to divine Providence for this also, which presented Arsenius alive to the eyes of all men, who has clearly proved their conspiracy and calumnies.<sup>31</sup>

Athanasius had taken the day again. But the tide of his good fortunes was fast running out.

In 334, a synod was convoked at Caesarea under the chair of its bishop, the famous Church historian, Eusebius. Apparently the gathering was the result of the Emperor's own desires, for he had grown ever friendlier to Arius<sup>32</sup> and, it is to be supposed, ever less so to Athanasius. The function of this Caesarean synod was to inquire again into the previously listed accusation against the pope at Alexandria.<sup>33</sup> It must inevitably be supposed, since no report of new evidence against Athanasius comes to light, that Constantine had begun to reconsider the practical advisability of his previous leniencies with him. Since peace and harmony within the Church were ever his chief aims, and because the convictions he was most often exposed to were those of Eusebius of Nicomedia\*, he had doubtless come to the view that Athanasius represented the stance of a minority in the East. If a minority position was also

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\*Eusebius, it must be borne in mind, was bishop of the capital city.

demonstrably a contentious faction, then, of course, it would appear necessary to Constantine that it be done away with. The time he had bided regarding Athanasius' refusal to readmit Arius (see MSS. p. 31 ) was now at an end.

The proceedings at Caesarea were inconsequential, for Athanasius refused to attend.<sup>34</sup> But in July of the following year, new action was undertaken by a synod held at Tyre. According to Sozomen, it was necessary to compel Athanasius' attendance, presumably by force or by threat of same, because of his previous refusal to be judged by his enemies at Caesarea.<sup>35</sup> He was charged with the following offenses:

--that he had broken a vase used in the celebration of the mysteries; that he had thrown down the episcopal chair; that he had often caused (Ischyrras), although he was a presbyter, to be loaded with chains, and that, by falsely accusing him before Hygenus, governor of Egypt, of casting stones at the statue of the emperor, he had occasioned his being thrown into prison; that he had deposed Callinicus, bishop of the Catholic Church at Pelusium, and had debarred him from communion until he could remove certain suspicions concerning his having broken a sacred vase; that he committed the bishopric of Pellusium to Mark, a deposed presbyter; and that he had placed Callinicus under the custody of soldiers, and had put him to the torture.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, as was the matter of Ischyrras resurrected, so also were the questions appertaining to his election and to Arsenius.<sup>37</sup> Further allegations, namely that he had had intimate relations with a woman and that he had caused Arsenius' arm to be cut off for purposes of sorcery, were dismissed with embarrassment when the so-called 'violated' woman was unable to distinguish Athanasius from one of his priests and when Arsenius suddenly appeared with both arms very much intact.<sup>38</sup>

Of course, the question of Athanasius' real guilt on some fronts is widely open to conjecture. The maxim about the little boy who cried 'Wolf' once too often would seem to apply here. It is really impossible to verify the truths inherent in the charges since, at root level, they were all of superfluous substance save for their intended result. And this time a result they procured.

Athanasius was spirited away from Tyre by the very officers who had been sent to assure his staying there. For the crowd had turned savage.<sup>39</sup> In his absence, the synod deposed him and banished him from Alexandria.<sup>40</sup> They also restored full privilege to John, the successor of Melitius, and for the second time in ten years reclaimed the Melitian schismatics.<sup>41</sup> Constantine was informed of the results of the proceedings by letter.<sup>42</sup>

The Synod at Tyre had ostensibly been set-up as a kind of pre-cursor for a synod to be held in Jerusalem upon the occasion of the grand celebration of the Emperor's thirteenth year of reign. Constantine had attended these subsequent festivities, had dedicated the new Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the City of David, and was on his way home when he was suddenly intercepted by Athanasius.<sup>43</sup> The result of his ensuing conversations with the now deposed bishop issued in a letter to all the bishops of Tyre, beginning as follows:

I know not what decisions are which you have arrived at in your council amidst noise and tumult: but somehow the truth seems to have been perverted in consequence of certain confusions and disorders, in that

you, through your mutual contentiousness, which you are resolved should prevail, have failed to perceive what is pleasing to God.\_\_\_\_<sup>44</sup>

On the surface of this evidence, one might presume to think that the emperor had repented of his previously alluded to alliance with those of the majority opinion. But this was no repentance. Rather was it momentary confusion on his part. One of the striking things to be noted in rehearsing the span of Constantine's years of relationship to the Church is that he was always on the side of the cleric at his ear.

Scarcely had his letter been sent when Eusebius of Nicomedia complained to the emperor, without apparent reference to the other charges, that Athanasius had threatened to withhold the grain of Alexandria from being shipped to Constantinople, the royal city.<sup>45</sup> Having already observed Athanasius' attitude on the subject of the state meddling in Church affairs, particularly as regards the issues of Arius' readmission (see MSS. p. 31) and his refusal to attend the synod at Caesarea (see MSS. p. 34), some credibility might be attributed to his having uttered such a threat in a moment of pique. At any rate, Constantine's reaction to this charge was instant and furious; Athanasius was banished to Treves in Gaul, and the first phase of the controversy drew to a close.

During the two years of life remaining to Constantine after the banishment, Athanasius did not set foot in the East again. Only one major happening was to be of happy significance for him,

and that was the death of Arius in 336.\* The first period had been marked by violence and by deceit. Aside from Melitian interests, the causative factors in the dispute all had their doctrinal grounding. And yet the dispute, during the lifetime of Constantine, could never be waged at the level of doctrine, for, according to the emperor, Nicaea had settled that once and for all. In this sense, then, perhaps it may be said that it was Constantine himself who was unwittingly responsible for the very strife he so abhorred within the Church. His death on May 22, 337<sup>46</sup> made possible a continuation of the controversy in the open air of real issues.

The Empire was divided into three parts, each of them ruled by a son of the recently deceased Emperor. The West went to Constantine II; the East to Constantius; and finally, the administration of Italy, Africa, and Greece went to the twelve year-old boy, Constans.<sup>47</sup> Needless to say, such an arrangement was fraught with the promise of a veritable 'battle royal'.

For Athanasius, the death of Constantine resulted in his rapid reprieve by the prince in the West. He was sent back to his Church forthwith, bearing with him on his return a letter by the junior Constantine. In part, it is as follows:

--Now seeing that it was the fixed intention of our master Constantine Augustus, my Father, to restore

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\*In a later letter to Serapion, one of his trusted bishops, Athanasius described this death by quoting from the Acts 1:18 depiction of Judas' demise: "-Falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst". "Ad Serapionem de Morte Aru," N & P-N, Fathers, op.cit. (See Notes) p. 565



(Athanasius) to his own place, and to your most beloved piety, but he was taken away by that fate which is common to all men, and went to his rest before he could accomplish his wish; I have thought proper to fulfill that intention of the Emperor of sacred memory which I have inherited from him.----<sup>48</sup>

The question as to whether the elder Constantine had truly planned such action is one which must be left hanging for lack of further evidence. Perhaps the letter is just a fitting memorial to what his better half might have done. At any rate, the barn-yard gate was open again, and it wouldn't be long before all the stock was out and on the rampage.

It took Athanasius five months of non-direct travelling to get back home.<sup>49</sup> He set about consolidating alliances as he went. Twice he saw Constantius, once at Viminacium and again at Caesarea in Cappodocia.<sup>50</sup> And he was not the only one going home. Several others of his persuasion, also exiled during the reign of the first Christian emperor, were released and on their way too.<sup>51</sup> Thus, a formidable Athanasian party was being coordinated before their leader even reached the gates of Alexandria.

Eusebius of Nicomedia had recently succeeded to the See of Constantinople, and, according to Sozomen, had been "appointed to superintend the concerns of (Constantius') royal household."<sup>52</sup> There he accomplished the re-banishment of several of the returned notables, chief among them Marcellus of Ancyra, before they had scarce settled down in their newly-won liberty.<sup>53</sup>

Athanasius' chief problem lay in the impetuosity of his swift resumption of episcopal prerogative in Alexandria. For

though free by Imperial decree, he had not troubled himself to be officially reinstated in the Church, from which many still held him to be legally deposed.<sup>54</sup> Obviously, support for him was sufficiently strong and popular that he could not easily be dislodged from his position by mere appeal to law. Instead, the Eusebians chose a certain Pistos, apparently an old Arian, to make counter-claims for recognition as true bishop over Egypt.<sup>55</sup>

Alexandria was again a diocese fragmented by schism. The Eusebians wisely chose as a base for their operations the somewhat more predictable surrounding of Antioch.<sup>56</sup> During the winter of 337-338, a synod was called there for the purpose of drawing up a list of charges against Athanasius. A copy was sent to each of the three emperors, and also a letter of explanation to Pope Julius in Rome, a man whom they had just cause to fear that he would ally himself with their adversary.<sup>57</sup>

But Athanasius was not to be caught napping at such a time. He convened a synod of his own at Alexandria, drew up a writ of defense, and sent the same immediately to Rome.<sup>58</sup> The emissaries from Antioch were set to flight, and Julius and Rome were lost to the anti-Nicene cause.<sup>59</sup>

In 339, at another synod at Antioch, this time with Constantius firmly aligned with Eusebian interests, Athanasius was again deposed.<sup>60</sup> Gregory of Cappodocia was selected to replace Pistos, who had disappeared.<sup>61</sup>\* Athanasius hid out in

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\*Athanasius asserts in his Epistola Encyclia (6) that Pistos had been anathematized and excommunicated by the "Catholic Bishops", but surely this does not explain his disappearance.

Alexandria for a time, but soon fled to his new ally, the Bishop of Rome.<sup>62</sup>

Capsuling the events which immediately followed, there ensued a series of diplomatic missions between Constantinople and Rome on the matter of this second deposition. Julius received Athanasius as a brother, and sent word to Antioch that he would hold a synod of his own at Rome to investigate matters further.<sup>63</sup> Eusebius' reply outraged him. Essentially Pope Julius was told that he could choose between Athanasius\* or continuation of communion with the Eastern Church.<sup>64</sup>

But the Chair of Peter was of no mind, nor of such weak estate, to be threatened by any such outburst as that. Julius fired off a stern reply, in which a most fascinating definition of conciliar purpose was included:

The Bishops who assembled in the great Council of Nicaea agreed, not without the will of God, that that the decisions of one council should be examined in another, to the end that the judges, having before their eyes that other trial which was to follow, might be led to investigate matters with the utmost caution, and that the parties concerned in their sentence might have assurance that the judgment they received was just, and not dictated by the enmity of their former judges.<sup>65</sup>

And so the synod at Rome was held as planned. Athanasius, in his Historia Arianorum, relates its outcome:

--at Rome about fifty bishops assembled, and denounced Eusebius and his fellows as persons suspected, afraid to come, and also condemned as unworthy of credit the written statement they had sent; but us they received, and gladly embraced our communion.<sup>66</sup>

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\*Marcellus of Ancyra, deposed for monarchianism, was listed with him.

In the summer of 341, ninety-seven of the eastern bishops came together in Antioch, ostensibly for the purpose of dedicating there the great church begun by Constantine ten years previously and just then completed by his son, Constantius.<sup>67</sup> Actually, the major concern of the gathering was not the dedication of the Church at all, but rather the drafting of a reply to the action of the synod at Rome.<sup>68</sup> And, at long last, the wraps came off in the matter of doctrine.

Athanasius, in his influencing of Julius, had convinced him that the Eusebians were basically Arian and anti-Nicene. And so these bishops felt compelled to reply to this charge, doing so in terms of a creed. For purposes of convenient reference, its tenets regarding the nature of the Son are here reproduced alongside those of the same from Nicaea:

Nicaea, 325\*

-And in one Lord Jesus Christ  
the Son of God,  
begotten from the Father,  
only begotten,  
that is, from the substance of  
the father,  
God from God,  
light from light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten not made,  
of one substance with the Father,  
through whom all things come into  
being,  
things in heaven and things on  
earth,  
Who because of us men and  
because of our salvation  
came down and became incarnate,

Antioch (So-called 2nd Creed),  
341.<sup>69</sup>

-And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
His Son,  
only begotten God,  
through Whom are all things  
Who was begotten before the  
ages from the Father,  
God from God,  
whole from whole,  
sole from sole,  
perfect from perfect,  
King from King,  
Lord from Lord,  
living Word  
living Wisdom,  
true Light, Way, Truth  
Resurrection, Shepherd, Door,  
unalterable and unchangeable,  
exact image of the Godhead,

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\*Noted in Chapter One, MSS. p. 18.

becoming man,  
 suffered and rose again on the  
     third day,  
 ascended to the heavens,  
 and will come to judge the  
     living and the dead;

substance,  
 will, power and glory of the  
     Father,  
 the first-begotten of all  
     creation,  
 Who was in the beginning  
     with God,  
 God the Word according to what  
 was said in the gospel,  
 'And the Word was God',  
 through Whom all things came  
     into being  
 and in Whom all things consist,  
 Who in the last days came down  
 from above,  
 And was born from a Virgin  
     according  
 to the Scriptures,  
 and became man,  
 mediator of God and men,  
 and Apostle of our faith,  
 and Prince of life,  
 as He says, 'I came down from  
 heaven, not to do my own will  
 but the will of Him Who sent  
     me',  
 Who suffered for us,  
 and rose again on the third day  
 and ascended to heaven,  
 and sat down on the Father's  
     right hand,  
 and will come again with glory  
     and power  
 to judge living and dead;

There are several striking features of the Creed which are most illuminative of the theological stance of this particular party of Athanasius' 'enemies'. First, it may be fairly well concluded, as was alluded to earlier (see MSS. p.29 ), that the Eusebians surely were not Arians. This is apparent not only through the attacked anathemas (not cited), but also is such phrases as "unalterable and unchangeable" and "who was in the beginning with God."<sup>70</sup> No, the Eusebians were not Arians, and as for the allegation that they were anti-Nicene, perhaps

it would be nearer the truth to conclude that they were, instead, ante-Nicene. The absence of the *ὁμοούσιον* is conspicuous, but it is not condemnatory. For the real significance of the Nicene Formulary had been expended in putting down Arius in 325. Its theology, by virtue of its politically-conceived ambiguousness (see Chapter One, MSS. pp. 20 - 21.), had never been used as a test for orthodoxy, not even by Athanasius or Julius.<sup>71</sup> What this Creed of Antioch really represents is the truth that a major portion of Eastern Churchmen, Nicaea aside, had never for a moment relinquished their old Origenist persuasion. The total picture of its pronouncements stands for the familiar thesis that in the Godhead there are three quite distinct hypostases, each possessing individual subsistence, rank, and glory, but unified by a common harmony of will<sup>72</sup> (see Chapter One, MSS. p. 6).

There was an unhappy ending to this so-called 'Dedication Council'. Scarcely was it over when Eusebius died. Rioting broke out in the streets of Constantinople over the question of his successor, and they had to be put down by Constantius himself.<sup>73</sup>

In the meantime, Rome continued to champ at the bit for a truly all-inclusive council, such as Eusebius had refused to enter in upon, in order to decide the fate of Athanasius and to decide upon terms normative for orthodoxy. With Eusebius dead, Constantius yielded to Constant's wish to convoke such a council, and it came together at Sardica in the fall of 342.<sup>74</sup>

It was only due to its joint imperial sponsorship that the Eusebians sent a delegation at all. And the one that finally did arrive was both small in numbers and quick to leave.<sup>75</sup> They had immediately petitioned for symbolical recognition of their own past synodal decisions, and this in terms of a request not to seat either Athanasius nor Marcellus of Ancyra at the present proceedings. At the West's refusal to honor this plea (and therefore, as they saw it, the integrity of Eastern conciliar pronouncements), they withdrew to Philippopolis and to their own devices.<sup>76</sup>

Ossius, Bishop of Cordova (see Chapter One, MSS. p. 17) co-chaired the Sardican synod with Protogenes, Bishop of Sardica.<sup>77</sup> As might have been expected, Athanasius was once again cleared of all charges previously held against him. But moreover adding injury to insult, the synod then presumed to excommunicate a long list of Eastern bishops on the charge of their being Arian heretics.<sup>78</sup> An encyclical letter was composed of the Sardican results,\* and a theological manifesto tacked on at its end. Purportedly attacking Arianism, this manifesto or so-called Creed of Sardica actually did no such thing. The real object of its onslaught was most precisely - and most uniquely - the Origenist formula of the three hypostases in the Godhead.<sup>79</sup> The picture begins to clear at this point: As the Eusebians were neither Arian nor anti-Nicene, but rather pro-Origenists, as has already been remarked with regard to

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\*See "Encyclical Letter of the Council of Sardica", Apologia Contra Arianos, Athanasius, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, op.cit. (see notes), pp. 123-127.

their 341 Creed of Antioch, so the West was, while certainly anti-Arian and pro-Nicene,\* also apparently anti-Origenist. That<sup>which</sup> was positively asserted at Sardica was the notion that there was but one divine hypostasis.<sup>80</sup> Recall that both 'hypostasis' and 'ousia' had often been taken as synonyms (see Chapter One, MSS. pp - 5). Sardica removed the category of 'ousia' altogether from the definition of the Godhead, and instead insisted that the Father and the Son were of identical substance, albeit of some undefined difference as persons.<sup>81</sup> The Father was conceded to be greater than the Son, although, this larger merit was solely appropriated by Him in virtue of His having the higher title.<sup>82</sup>

Let us pause to consider the plight of Athanasius in all of this. Here was a bishop of the East, a product of Alexandrian and therefore Origenist schooling, compelled by circumstances to flee perhaps for his very life to the West. His real doctrinal differences with the Eusebian Party were those between brother Origenists, his of the Right-Wing line and theirs of the Left. Certainly, it had been politics which was the major issue dividing him from them. But now, in the very council which had vindicated him, a theology was propounded as an addendum which must have seemed incredible to him. The chaos and schism of 342 was the direct result of the impossible alliances formed by both sides of the dispute. The real theology of the Eusebians had become lost to sight in the mire of their

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\*Though this was mainly a matter of politics for Athanasius himself, for he demonstrated at this time in his life a great reluctance to use the *ὁμοούσιον*, (See Lietzmann, op.cit. (see notes), p. 198)



expedient affiliations with the Arians and Meletians. And now Athanasius, as a result of his own expedient affiliations, had become enmeshed in a net of resurgent Monarchianism.

It was to his credit, therefore, that the Sardican formula was never officially approved.<sup>83</sup> Later on, he attempted to deny its ever being seriously considered:

For whereas some demanded, on the ground that the Nicene synod was defective, the drafting of a creed, and in their haste even attempted it, the holy synod assembled in Sardica was indignant, and decreed that no statement of faith should be drafted, but that they should be content with the Faith confessed by the fathers at Nicaea,\_\_\_\_\_.<sup>84</sup>

In the year 345, Gregory of Cappodocia died, and with the way now cleared for him to do so with a minimum of anticipated trouble, Constantius, Emperor of the East, recalled Athanasius to his see. It was not without hesitation that the Bishop finally did return to Alexandria, for it took three letters from Constantius to convince him that the whole thing wasn't a plot.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, one year later he re-entered his bishopric, and one recent account of that occasion reads as follows:

The people, together with the civic authorities, are said to have streamed out like a second Nile to meet him a hundred miles from Alexandria. A sea of faces gazed from every point of vantage, ears were strained to catch the tones of his voice, cheers and clapping accompanied his progress. The air was fragrant with incense, and the city blazed with illuminations. Such external expressions of real were accompanied by a widespread spiritual revival, an outburst of charitable generosity, and a fresh impulse to monastic dedication. Bishops wrote from all quarters to welcome his return, "and in the churches there was a profound and wonderful peace."<sup>86</sup>

In the meantime, in the wake of Constantius' apparent shift to the right, the Eastern bishops who had spurned Sardica, who had been condemned by it, and who in turn had condemned the higher-ups in the Western Church,<sup>87</sup> were suddenly transformed from an offensive to a defensive position. Coming together, they drafted the rather apologetic formulary, Ecthesis Macrostichos (or Long-lined Creed), and dispatched it forthwith, by the persons of three bishops, to Milan in Italy.\*<sup>88</sup>

In spite of the fact that the Ecthesis Macrostichos studiously avoided the terms 'hypostasis' and 'busia', substituting in the former's place the word πρόσωπον and in spite of the fact that the unity of the Godhead was staunchly confessed to, nevertheless the Western bishops at Milan refused to have anything to do with a creed that affirmed the existence of three, distinct 'things' (πράγματα) and of a like number of separate 'faces' (πρόσωπα).<sup>89</sup> It was contended most ridiculously that such notions branded their adherents with the stigmata of Arianism.<sup>90</sup> One cannot help but wonder at what the results might have been at Milan had Athanasius still been in the West. For it seems that what the Ecthesis Macrostichos had seriously attempted was a rapprochement with Athanasian, rather than Western, doctrine. It went even so far as to employ Athanasius' own early definition that "the Son was like the Father in all things."<sup>91</sup> The signs would tend to indicate that the Easterners were misinformed as to the real nature of Athanasius' relationship

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\*For its text, see De Synodis, Athanasius, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, op,cit. (see notes), pp. 462-464.

to the West (see MSS. pp. 45-46). And the sad result of their mistaken judgment was that the torn edges of the Church's schism were not only not healed, but instead further enflamed.

All remained uneasily quiet until 350. During that year, a general by the name of Magnentius had himself declared Emperor of the West and was accepted as such almost immediately by the people.<sup>92</sup> Constans, Athanasius' friend and protector, had long been unpopular on account of his open homosexuality and the consequent foppishness of his court.<sup>93</sup> Magnentius, in attempting to win support from the East, sent envoys to Athanasius at Alexandria beseeching the favors of Egypt. It later was charged that Athanasius had corresponded with the "usurper," but this he loudly disclaimed in a subsequent Apologia ad Constantium.\*

But again the handwriting was on the wall. Constans was murdered in the same year,<sup>94</sup> and when his body fell, it fell not merely as Emperor of the West but also as brother of the Emperor of the East. Athanasius was confronted not only with a charge of being in league with the slaughterer, but also with having lost the most powerful of his allies. And, as if matters were not precarious enough, in 352 Pope Julius, his other chief defender, died.<sup>95</sup>

The death of Constans had once again raised the hopes of those Eastern clerics so forcefully and tactlessly rebuffed at Sardica and Milan. In 353, Magnentius committed suicide in

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\*See sections 6-11, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, op.cit. (see Notes), pp. 240-242.

Lyons at the prospect of an imminent defeat, and the Roman Empire came to rest once more in the hands of a single ruler, Constantius.<sup>96</sup> Liberius, the successor to Julius, had already been appealed to by the anti-Athanasians, that he might reopen investigations into the findings of the synod at Tyre concerning his brother-pope, the Bishop of Alexandria.<sup>97</sup> This cause Liberius now set before Constantius, for Athanasius had already declined a command from him to appear in answer to a repetition of the charges.\*<sup>98</sup>

Whereas Liberius wished to call together a Church synod to judge the matter, Constantius was of no mind to waste any more time on it. From Athanasius' later Apologia ad Constantium,\*\* it may be deduced that the emperor held the following grievances against him: that he had tried to set Constans against him: that he had tried to set Constans against Constantius, that he had corresponded with Magnentius, that he had used an undedicated Church, and that he had disobeyed an Imperial order. Toward the double end of rectifying such abuse and of asserting the authority of the state over that of the Church, Constantius at Arles forced the assent of several Italian bishops, and even of the (Roman) papal legates, to a renewed condemnation of Athanasius.<sup>99</sup>

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\*Lietzmann (op.cit., see Notes, p. 214) would have it that Athanasius took Liberius' own command to be an administrative error. But it is more likely that he was merely acting in accordance with that same notion of episcopal autonomy which so colored his rivals in the East, i.e., with regard to their outrage over the meddling of the West at both Sardica and Milan. Athanasius could use the West, but he was always an Easterner!

\*\*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, op.cit. (see Notes), pp. 238-253.

But as regards the question of the state intruding itself into ecclesiastical affairs, Liberius had his own interests to protect. He therefore prevailed upon Constantius to convoke a Church synod at Milan to treat upon the Athanasian problem.<sup>100</sup> Such a synod met in 355, and under the severest personal pressure from Constantius not to raise doctrinal issues, again condemned Athanasius.<sup>101</sup>

It took the combined legion armies of both Egypt and Libya to finally displace Athanasius from his Alexandrian strong-hold.<sup>102</sup> Evidently, his popular support in that city was an overwhelming one, and it was to become even more so in reaction to the atrocities committed there by the Imperial forces and by the new bishop who would act in his stead (see below). One very dramatic account of Athanasius' withdrawal from the city is as follows:

One evening, early in 356(?), Athanasius was presiding at a service of preparation for the Holy Communion at the largest church in Alexandria (the Theonas Church), when suddenly the doors flew open, and the packed congregation saw the entrance occupied by troops. Athanasius sat down on his throne in the apse, ordering his deacon to read the 136th Psalm, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is gracious." Verse by verse the congregation responded, "For his mercy endureth for ever." A crowd of clergy and monks interposed between the archbishop and the soldiers, who were thrusting their way towards the chancel; he himself refused to leave until the congregation had made their departure unmolested; then at last he suffered his faithful protectors to carry him to safety.<sup>103</sup>

But 'safety' was a very tenuous thing for Athanasius and his faithful in the days to come. The bishop did not leave Alexandria, but remained hidden somewhere within the walls.

He had intended, as was his usual custom during such threatening times (see MSS. p. 35), to take his case directly to the Emperor. But conditions within his see now were such that he felt he could not desert the people.\* He described one such condition, in a purportedly incredulous report to Constantius, in the following way:

--But now these worthy Arians (Athanasius is here ironic and now literal with regard to both noun and adjective) who have slandered me, and by whom conspiracies have been formed against most of the bishops, having obtained the consent and cooperation of the (civil) magistrates, first stripped (the Holy Virgins), and then caused them to be suspended upon what are called Hermetaries (racks), and scourged them on the ribs so severely these several times, that not even real malefactors have ever suffered the like.\*104

Athanasius was succeeded in his bishopric this time by a man called George of Cappodocia. Needless to say, his respect for his successor was not of the highest nature:

And now one George, a Cappodocian, who was contractor of stores at Constantinople, and having embezzled all monies that he received, was obliged to fly, he commanded to enter Alexandria with military pomp, and supported by the authority of the General.\*\*\* Next, finding one Epictetus a novice, a bold young man, he loved him, perceiving that he was ready for wickedness; and by his means he carries on his designs against those of the bishops whom he desires to run.105

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\*Moreover, the real fierceness of the attack upon his domain no doubt raised hard questions as to the advisability of his exposure before Constantius at that time.

\*\*What chance has any writing today if it doesn't include a little sex and sadism?

\*\*\*Syrianus, heading the legions of Egypt and Libya. (Lietzman, op.cit., See Notes, p. 216.

Athanasius finally fled the city and disappeared into the desert.<sup>106</sup> This third exile spelled the birth of a new era of doctrinal formulizing. For his part - and for that of his followers, things had so turned toward a new and uncertain future that it now seemed best to fully commit one's allegiance to that old, familiar formulary of happy remembrance, the Creed of Nicaea.<sup>107</sup> His opponents in the East, on the other hand, became so unthreatened as a result of the sudden turn of events that they grew careless in supervising their own household, and Arianism-proper began to appear in their midst.

In 355, a synod was convoked at Sirmium, the first in a series of such meetings which were to serve as the mouth-piece of the Neo-Arian movement.<sup>108</sup> Constantius, under the influence of his two theological advisers, Ursacius of Singidienum and Valens of Mursa,<sup>109</sup> prescribed the terms for all future disputation. Quoting from the so-called Second Creed of Sirmium (357), these terms were:

--But we cannot and ought not to preach that there are two Gods,\_\_\_\_\_.

But inasmuch as some or many were troubled about substance (substantia), which in Greek is called usia, that is, to make it more explicit, homoeousion or the term homoeousion, there ought to be no mention of these at all and no one should preach them, for the reason and ground that they are not contained in inspired Scripture,\_\_\_\_\_.<sup>110</sup>

The implications of the afore-cited seem plain. As one great patristics scholar has observed: "Without directly preaching Arianism, the formula was an edict of tolerance in its favor, while the Nicene party found itself excluded from this tolerance."<sup>111</sup>

The Sirmium proceedings were chiefly Western, and their direct consequence in the East, therefore, was very slight. But now, as has been previously alluded to, a real Arian problem began to develop in the East also, and it went by the name of Anomoeism.<sup>112</sup> Its membership consisted of those who believed that "the Son is unlike (*ἀγόρευος*) the Father in all things."<sup>113</sup> This was the radical assertion by which its adherents intended to underscore the marked distinction existing between the persons of the Father and the Son. Communion of divine essence between the two persons, as in the contentions of Arius himself (see Chapter One, MSS. p. 14), was categorically denied.<sup>114</sup> Where Anomoeism differed from Arius was in its conclusions that the divine energy could be and was shared by the Father with the Son and that the Godhead was perfectly comprehensible because it was so simple.<sup>115</sup>

But the great central body of Eastern churchmen were not to be taken in by such thinking as this. True to the tradition of their past leader, Eusebius, they rallied to the flag of anti-Arian enterprise. In 358, they flocked to a meeting at Ancyra which was presided over by the local bishop, a man named Basil.<sup>116</sup> There it was decided that Nicaea would not be appealed to, that the *ὁμοούσιον* would not be defended, but that the doctrine that the Son was like the Father in substance (*ὁμοούσιος*) was absolutely essential to the preservation of orthodox faith.<sup>117</sup>

Sirmium, the council center of the West which had begun



its days of theological pronouncement with a gentle view towards Arianism, was transformed into a propaganda plant for the Homoeousian ideal upon the conversion of Constantius' thought by Basil soon after the Ancyran synod.<sup>118</sup> Constantius was now prevailed upon to convene a general council of the entire Church in order to settle things once and for all. To this end two parallel councils finally sat down, one in the West at Timini and one in the East at Seleucia.<sup>119</sup>

These councils had set before them, as a plan from which they were supposed to work, the Fourth Creed of Sirmium (or the co-called 'Dated Creed'). It had been prepared in the emperor's presence in May of 359.<sup>120</sup> This 'Dated Creed' was for Constantius what the *ὁμολογία* had been for his father, Constantine. That is to say, it was ambiguous to the extent that it was supposed it would please everyone. The *ἐκπόσιον* was included, but its reference to substance, ie., *οὐσία* had been broadened appreciably to "But we say the Son is like the Father in all things (*κατὰ πάντα*)." <sup>121</sup> This was designed to please the Arians in their shunning of the terminology of 'substance.' Likewise, the 'orthodox' could draw delight from the declaration that the Son "was begotten impassibly from God before all ages and before all beginning and before all conceivable time, etc.,"<sup>122</sup> to the exclusion of Arian claims to the contrary.

But, as in the case of Constantine earlier, Constantius' compromise with the basic issues of the debate was to provide no solution at all. In the West, the royal plan was immediately

scrapped, the usage of 'substance' and the *ὁμοούσιον* endorsed, and the Creed of Nicaea affirmed once again.<sup>123</sup> This decision did not stand long, for the emperor was infuriated by it and forced his will upon that gathering in terms of coercing them finally into an adoption of a revised version of the 'Dated Creed'. The revisions were severe, for they deleted the *κατὰ πᾶντα* after the *ὁμοούσιον* (see above) and prohibited the use, not only of *πρόσωπον* but also of the 'one hypostasis' terminology.<sup>124</sup> These actions undertaken in the West were formally signed at Nicé on the 10th of October, 359.<sup>125</sup>

Things at Seleucia in the East fared no better. For there they were prepared to endorse the 341 Creed of Antioch (see MSS. pp. 41 - 43).<sup>126</sup> The great majority present were full-blown Homoeousians, but the minority had the Imperial backing, and they turned out, significantly enough, to be Homoean revisers such as those who had carried the day at Nice.<sup>127</sup> No formal decision was agreed upon at Seleucia, but Constantius finally forced agreement of the Easterners to his schema on the last day of the year in 359.<sup>128</sup>

The following month, in 360, the emperor at long last sealed the matter by wringing from both the Western Homoeousians and the Eastern Homoeousians a joint confession of the Homoean stance. This confession, signed at Constantinople, is the so-called Creed of Ariminum,<sup>129</sup> and it was substantially the same as that one signed at Nice.

Between the occasions of the first synod at Sirmium in 355 and the conclusion of proceedings at Constantinople in 360,

Athanasius was kept busy in his place of refuge by a prolific surge of writings.\* It had been in the 350's, probably between 351-355, that he had finally decided to stand full weight upon the implications of the ~~Hom~~omoousian (Cf. Note on MSS. p. 45). This argument first appears in his defence of Nicaea, De Decretis, which he had written as an attack against the Eusebians.<sup>130</sup> Such an endorsement of the Nicene term was not without perspective, for in his earlier works he had subscribed to both the *ὁμοῖος κατὰ πάντα* which the Eusebians had proffered in the Ecthesis Macrostichos (see MSS. pp. 47 - 48), and the *ὁμοῖος κατ' οὐσίαν*, ie., like the Father in essence or nature, which was very nearly the *ὁμοούσιος* of Basil's 358 synod at Ancyra (see MSS. p. 53).<sup>131</sup> Athanasius, after due speculation, conceived the Homoeousios to be inapplicable to the Godhead, for such described the divine relationship in terms best reserved to the filiality between humans.<sup>132</sup>

But, as a result of the action of Constantinople in 360, he suddenly found himself, a backer of the Homoeousios, tossed into a common dungeon of persecution with his old enemies, the backers of the Homoeousios. Almost overnight, the two major parties, who had railed at each other for so many years in their respective self-assurances of 'orthodox' belief, were relegated to being a single victim of the Imperial design. Such would prove too much in the East, for while they might

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\*During this time he wrote the Vita S. Antoni, Four Discourses Against the Arians, the Historia Arianoru, and the De Synodis as major works among several others.

argue points of doctrine among themselves, they had long been in separate concord as to a lack of appreciation at outside meddling in their local ecclesiastical affairs.

On November 3, 361, Constantius died of a fever while marching his troops to encounter his nephew, Julian, who was presently heading a revolt.<sup>133</sup> Julian succeeded him with little further ado. This man is best known to historians as 'the Apostate', for he had rejected Christianity in favor of a return to classical Greek polytheism. But this was his own personal decision, and aside from a restoration of the ancient cults, he saw it in his best interests to be initially friendly to the Christian Church.. As such, he deemed it expedient to restore all exiles to their homes, though not necessarily to their former offices.<sup>134</sup>

On February 21, 362, Athanasius once again reached the gates of Alexandria.<sup>135</sup> George of Cappadocia had been removed from contention for the bishopric there in the following manner:

--When the magistrates had announced to the public the decease of Constantius, and the accession of Julian, the Pagans of Alexandria\* rose up in sedition. They attacked George with such violence that it was expected he would have been torn to pieces; but they merely, for the time being, committed him to prison. The following day, however, they repaired early in the morning to the prison, killed him, flung the corpse upon a camel, and after exposing it to every insult during the day, burnt it at nightfall.<sup>136</sup>

So Athanasius, again without resorting to official reinstallation (see MSS. p. 39), assumed the reins of the See of Alexandria.<sup>137</sup>

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\*George had been ruthless in the suppression of all religions other than Christianity. Sozomen, op,cit. (see notes), pp. 216-217.

In 362, at a synod in Alexandria under Athanasius' chairmanship, the guidelines were drawn for a rapprochement between the Homoousion party and the Homoeousion party. Its decision's survive in the Tomus ad Antiochenos\*, a report of the goings-on sent to the Church in Antioch. Basically, the following things were affirmed: the Meletians were to be acknowledged, the non-creaturely, divine essentiality of the Holy Spirit was to be proclaimed, the Creed of Sardica (see MSS. pp. 44-45) was denounced, the question of one (or three) 'hypostases' was not to be pressed, and Christ's human nature was to be held complete and not just the body only. The eighth section concludes with the pronouncement of a new spirit for the times:

Perhaps God will have pity on us, and unite what is divided, and, there being once more one flock, we shall all have one leader, even our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>138</sup>

The terms for reunion were broad and could be reduced to three tenets; the Arian heresy must be cursed, the Nicene confession (in its ambiguity) must be accepted, and the subsistent divinity of the paraclete maintained.<sup>159</sup>

But at a time when the fires of discord were thus abating within the Church, the new Emperor Julian reversed his earlier tone of leniency to Christianity and turned upon it in a new wave of Imperial persecutions. One of his first actions, of course, was the rebanishment of Athanasius.<sup>140</sup> It is reported by one ancient commentator that he took his leave of the city

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\*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, op.cit. (see Notes), pp. 483-486.

for this the fourth time with the following farewell:

On the announcement of the command enjoining this immediate departure, Athanasius said to the Christian multitudes who stood weeping around him, "Be of good courage; it is but a cloud which will speedily be dispersed."<sup>141</sup>

And so it indeed was 'speedily dispersed'. On June 26th, 363, Julian fell prey to a Persian lancer's marksmanship and died just after midnight of the following morning.<sup>142</sup> Athanasius was again returned to Alexandria; this time by Jovian, the new Imperial successor. Moreover, Jovian took the trouble to travel with Athanasius to Antioch, where at last the aging bishop was officially reappointed to his see.<sup>143</sup> Athanasius himself preserved the dialogue between Arian protestors to this enactment and Jovian, an example of which follows:

Arians: With his mouth (Athanasius) utters what is right, but in his soul he harbors guile.

Jovian: That will do, you have testified of him, that he utters what is right and teaches aright with his tongue, but harbors evil thoughts in his soul, it concerns him before God. For we are men and hear what is said; but what is in the heart God knows.<sup>144</sup>

In 364, Athanasius called together a council of the Egyptian bishops at Alexandria in order to shore up the foundations of the new unity begun there two years previous.<sup>145</sup> The Creed of Nicaea was proclaimed to be the sole rule of faith, and in such, of course, the Homoousios was declared to be correct.<sup>146</sup> A similar synod, called at Antioch under another Melitius and a Eusebius of Samosata, corroborated the Alexandrian stand, but with the qualification that the Homoousion

be understood in the sense of *ὁμοίος καὶ οὐσίαν* (see MSS. p. 56), i.e., meaning "similar in nature" rather than of "identical substance."<sup>147</sup>

Athanasius was by now nearly seventy years-old. Under Jovian, he lived his life in a most personally unprecedented security. But again, for the fifth time in his remarkable life, he was to face exile. Upon the untimely death of his friend and protector, Jovian, the Roman Empire was again split apart into Western and Eastern jurisdictions, the former being run by Valentinian and the other by Valens.<sup>148</sup> In Lampascus, a synod was convoked by bishops who, unhappy with the resurrection of the Nicene formulary, wished to settle the credal matter in another way. What they ultimately affirmed was the uncoerced Creed of Seleucia (see MSS. p. 45), which amounted, in fact, to an adoption of the 341 Antioch "Dedication Creed" (see MSS. pp. 41 - 43) with a Homoeousion interpretation.<sup>149</sup> Athanasius, needless to say, had no relation to the doctrinal machinations of this synod, but he was, by his past life, peripherally involved in another issue stirred to new life at Lampascus. Eudoxios, an unrepentant Anomoean, had been consecrated Bishop of the capital city of Constantinople during the reign of Constantius,<sup>150</sup> and now the party at Lampascus disavowed recognition of his claims to office.<sup>151</sup> The results of this action were to be measured in the rebanishment of almost every bishop who had been deposed by Constantius, for Eudoxios, at Constantinople, held Valen's ear.<sup>152</sup>

So once again Athanasius made ready to depart Alexandria. The city ~~rumbled~~ with threats of a tumult, but this time the bishop left quietly, and as some said, "he concealed himself among the tombs of his ancestors, being apprehensive lest he should be regarded as the cause of any disturbances that might ensue: \_\_\_\_." <sup>153</sup>

He was recalled five months later, in February of 366, apparently because his enemies preferred facing him in office to exciting his intrigues from without. <sup>154</sup> He lived out the seven years remaining him in comparative peace, and on May 2, 373, at the age of seventy-five years, died in bed at his beloved Alexandria. <sup>155</sup>

The question to be answered now, in conclusion to this rather lengthy look at the unfolding life of Athanasius, is whether or not some evidence has been garnered to support an argument for his theological significance. It has been plain all along that his politics were accomplished, but this is a point which has never been disputed in the annals of patristic scholarship. Certainly a history such as this one cannot replace the evidence of the man's own theological writings, and that will be the topic under consideration in the next chapter. But may not such a history provide some indications as to the likelihood of discovery within the texts themselves?

I think positive evidence is adduced from three main areas of his life: first, in the argument that his was the influence behind Alexander's in the Pre-Nicene and Nicene flight with the



Arians-proper (see MSS. pp. 16 , 24-26 , 29 ); second, that his position on the Homoousion appears to be an evolutionary one (see MSS. pp. 43 , 45 note, 47, 56); and third, that he not only disclaimed the pronouncements of Sardica (see MSS. p. 58 ) but moreover apparently was influential in their never becoming official (see MSS. p. 46 ).

If, as his critics contend; the issues of doctrine were 'merely a dull, blunt weapon of defense' in his politically ambitious hands, why then did he venture an offensive assault upon the Arians prior to and indeed within the Council of Nicaea? Such action was causative of party factionizing, not resultant of such, and it seems inconceivable that a deacon in his twenties, albeit Bishop Alexander's secretary, could hope to turn it to notable political advantage!

Certainly, Athanasius' evolving appreciation for and ultimate adoption of the Homoousion signifies a real concern by him for the theological expression of truth. His early thinking on the question was sufficiently acceptable as to be adopted by the framers of the Ecthesis Macrostichos. Although politically holding to an inflexible defense of the Nicene proceedings, he was prepared to interpret its credal assertions in a most flexible manner. And this flexibility was not one of mere wavering, but rather of a consistent bending to one side in the direction of his thought's progress.

Finally, need Athanasius have interposed himself between the Sardican Formulary and the Western bishops who, having met

expressly in his defense, produced it? If such he really did, it must have been because he felt the need to defend the integrity of his own doctrine, a commodity which many of his latter-day critics would tend to deny him.

So - one conclusion of this thesis is that Athanasius did indeed pursue a line of theological endeavor independent of his political considerations. And it will be the task of the next chapter to examine the quality of the 'endeavor' in the closer light of the major writings themselves.

Chapter ThreeAthanasius' Doctrine

For, what our Fathers have delivered, this is truly doctrine; and this is truly the token of doctors, to confess the same thing with each other, and the vary neither from themselves nor from their fathers; whereas they who have not this character are to be called not true doctors but evil.

--Athanasius, De Decretis II. 5

The doctrinal problems confronting Athanasius and his contemporaries in the Fourth Century's trinitarian debate are not without their parallels in any age. Today, for instance, we live in a world which by and large takes for granted the fact that the earth is one of a number of planets revolving in set order around a central body known as the sun. If one were to ask as to the origin of this earth, the answer given would be in scientific terms of solar fragmentation, the cooling of a fiery, giant meteor, the irruption of micro-organisms into an ascendancy of ever-developing types of life, and so forth. The Twentieth Century Christian is challenged to produce a description of God which both squares with what man now knows about the Creation and also with what has long been attested of its Creator by the Faith of the Church. And this is precisely what is required of theologians in every century; it is precisely what was required of Athanasius so long ago.

But in the Fourth Century, the question of the origin of Creation was not so much a thing of empirical science as it

was an object for philosophic speculation. This has already been observed with regard to Origen's theologizing (see MSS pp. 2 - 3). He had to contend with the notion that the world around him was 'the symbolic reflection of invisible realities,' a product of some mediatorial force located somewhere between the all-perfection of the true Godhead and the imperfection of the material order. And, as it will be recalled, he posited the Son of the divine Triad as that self-same mediatorial force, through whom the Father eternally created the universe. The Son, in Origen's schema, was clearly subordinated to the Father, but the definition of their essential relationship was both confusing to and confused by later interpreters.

Athanasius, living and writing a century later, had to wrestle with very similar prevailing cosmological presuppositions in his own time. He was an Origenist doctrinally (see p. 23), and it may be expected that he was not a little influenced by the slant of such theology as it was rendered to him by his conservative episcopal predecessor.\*

Yet, in his own right, Athanasius' thinking was most directly shaped by two compelling sources of authority: the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Council. Of the former, it is only necessary to leaf through the pages of any work of his to see how important a part they played in his arguments. He consistently charged his opponents with ignorance concerning them, an example

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\*Bishop Alexander. See P. 3.

of which follows:

But forasmuch as they pretend to charge me with cowardice, it is necessary that I should write somewhat concerning this, whereby it shall be proved that they are men of wicked minds, who have not read the sacred Scriptures: or if they have read them, that they do not believe the divine inspiration of the oracles they contain.<sup>1</sup>

But such interest in and appeal to the Scriptures was his by right of succession in a direct line from his brother-Alexandrian, Origen (see pp. 1 and 2). What was unique about Athanasius, the Origenistic biblicist, was his appeal to the divine authority of the Holy Council. In fact, he equated the pronouncements of Nicaea with the very Gospel itself:\*

--In his rebuke of the Galatians, (St. Paul) made a broad declaration, "If anyone preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be anathema, as I have said, so say I again. If even we, or an angel from heaven should preach unto you any other Gospel than that ye have received, let him be anathema" (Gal. 1:8,9). Since then the Apostle thus speaks, let these men either anathematise Eusebius (of Nicomedia) and his fellows, at least as changing round and professing what is contrary to their subscriptions (to the Creed of Nicaea); or, if they acknowledge that their subscriptions were good, let them not utter complaints against so great a council.<sup>2</sup>

What is to explain this sudden intrusion of the conciliar voice as a weighty matter in the issue of promulgating correct doctrine? As has been demonstrated in the second chapter of this work, only the emperors of the times really considered the credal assertions of such to be binding upon

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\*It is interesting to contrast this view with that of Pope Julius of Rome. See his thought on the mutability of conciliar decision, p. 40.

the Church. And yet, in the imposing historical stature of Athanasius, surely the most significant ecclesiastic of his day, one finds the same, seemingly naive opinion.

But was it, indeed, a 'naive opinion'? The great ecumenical Council of Nicaea was not the sole unprecedented event in the life of the Fourth Century Church. In fact, it was merely a product of that truly unique and over-arching occasion, the Recognition and Imperial Establishment of the Christian religion itself. Almost over-night the Church was transformed from a small, persecuted minority into a large, appreciated majority, from a group drawn together in its muffled diversity by the common threat of extinction into a group split asunder by the very Establishment which afforded it the luxury of internal violence (see pp. 16 and 17 ). Therefore, the issue of correct doctrine in Athanasius' life-time could not be merely a matter for the scholarship of separate individuals. The subsequent polity of the One Body of Christ hung in the offing: Was the Church to continue in the situation of warring theological factions, or was it to find true catholicity in an authority allotted to ecumenical agreement?

Athanasius' has been correctly regarded as a clever politician, in so far as he was able to successfully further the fortunes of his own person. But it seems equally sure that the measure of his politics transcended the immediacy of his own ambitions and was , in fact, in his view of the Council, a major building block in the foundation of the development

of the Church. He appears to have seen the point in the midst of the history engulfing him, and the development of his own doctrine must therefore be viewed as the development of a defense of that point, a defense gauged to the particularities of Nicaea.

Toward the end of justifying the assertion made immediately above, this chapter's examination of Athanasius' doctrine will confine itself to five major works: the Expositio Fidei, De Decretis, Ad Episcopos Aegypti, Orationes contra Arianos, and the De Synodis. Moreover, since the problem of the Homousion was unquestionably the ranking difficulty posed most parties reluctant to subscribe to the authority of Nicaea, the investigation of the above-listed works will be further limited to a main consideration of this expression.

The Expositio Fidei\* is considered to be one of Athanasius' earliest works. The best guess as to the date of its composition is 328, and the occasion for its writing may well have been the author's consecration to the episcopate.<sup>3</sup> Since this treatise probably just post-dates the Council of Nicaea, and because it appears to pre-date the later furor of the matured controversy, it affords the student a fine example of Athanasius' least politically orientated doctrine. It certainly represents the roots from which all of his later theologizing proceeded, and so I have considered it expedient to

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\*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, op.cit. (See Notes), pp. 84 and 85.

outline its contents below:

- | <u>Father</u>           | <u>Son</u>  | <u>Holy Spirit</u>          |
|-------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. Unbegotten.          | 1. Eternally Only-begotten.                                 | 1. Searches all things.     |
| 2. Maker of all things. | 2. Perfect.   | 2. Proceed from the Father. |
|                         | 3. True image of the Father.                                | 3. Conveyed by the Son.     |
|                         | 4. Equal in honor and glory to the Father.                  | 4. Fills all things.        |
|                         | 5. Economic role-unity with the Father over things created. |                             |
|                         | 6. <u>LIKE</u> the Father.                                  |                             |
|                         | 7. Took humanity upon Himself in time.                      |                             |
|                         | 8. Was the incarnate demonstrator of truth and salvation.   |                             |
|                         | 10. The body of Jesus is <u>not</u> ascribed to the Father. |                             |

As a:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 3. Well   | 11. River                                  |
| ("So the Father's deity passes into the Son without flow and without division") |  |
|   | 12. Through Him, all things were made.     |
|   | 13. He is <u>NOT</u> a creature.           |
|   | 14. Nor is he therefore changeable.        |
|   | 15. His earthly body <u>is</u> creaturely. |
|   | a) It is new,                              |
|   | b) Salvational,                            |
|   | c) and provides access to the Father.      |

Alexander's influence seems plain in this document, especially regarding the notion of the Son being 'like' the



Father (see 'Son', point 6 above).<sup>\*</sup> Yet, it is too simple a thing to rule out the concept of the Homocousion relationship in Athanasius' thinking on the matter, even if he did not make explicit use of the term in the positive formulation of his own early views. Indeed, he denounces that Sabellian assertion of *μονοούσιον καὶ οὐχ ὁμοούσιον* and the implication strongly exists that the latter term is to be preferred in the contrast. While his Well-River analogy (see 'Father', 3 - 'Son', 11 above) applies specifically to the phenomenon of coinherence in divinity, still it is not a far step to the conclusion that divinity is merely an attribute of the Godhead's substance.

By and large, the Expositio Fidei stands for a conservative Origenist position. Not only is the question of substantial unity *passed over*, but moreover the mediatorial function of the Logos is neither questioned nor elaborated.

But these silences are not the case in the next of his notable works, the De Decretis. This treatise on "The Defense of the Nicene Tradition" has been dated by scholars to a point somewhere between 351 and 355.<sup>4</sup> This means that the time of its writing was somewhere between the death of Constans and the synod at Milan (see pp. 48 - 50), and its origination was quite likely Alexandria.

The most notable thing about this document is its treatment of the mediatorial Creation, i.e., the theological

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<sup>\*</sup>Care must be taken not to equate the meaning of the concept rendered here with that implied by the later Homoeans. See pp. 54 and 55.

assertions made about the cosmological. The presuppositions of the latter are corroborated but in a very special sense. He wrote, as regards the Arian notion that the Son was merely a creaturely demi-god who did God's creating for him. (see p. 14), the following question:

Now I wonder who it was that suggested to you so futile and novel an idea as that the Father alone wrought with His own hand the Son alone, and that all other things were brought to be by the Son as an underworker?<sup>5</sup>

Such, in fact, would have been the contemporary analysis of Creation, had its Christian figuration been stripped away. Athanasius shows that he sees the folly in such a usage of the prevailing notion, for to make these claims includes the unscriptural idea that the Father is far removed from the earth and its creatures. Rather, he maintains the mediatorial function of the Son in this way:

He (the Father) it is who through His Word made (Himself) all things small and great, and we may not divide the creation, and say this is the Father's, and this the Son's, but they are of one God, who uses His proper Word as a Hand, and in Him does all things.<sup>6</sup>

.....

He did not disdain to make all things Himself through the Word; for these are but parts of the whole (Creation).<sup>7</sup>

The obvious question was posed:

For if it was impossible for things originate to bear the hand of God, and you hold the Son be one of their number, how was He too equal to this formation by God alone?<sup>8</sup>

Athanasius, in all of the aforesaid, performed as a conscientious Origenist. The mediatorial nature of the Logos

was maintained in the doctrine of an eternal Creation. But what this really meant - and Athanasius spelled it out precisely - is that the all-sufficiency of the Godhead does not need a mediator for the purpose of creating; He merely chooses to do so because such is His will:

And though we were to devise another (Mediator), we must first devise His Mediator, so that we shall never come to an end. And thus a Mediator being ever in request, never will the creation be constituted, because nothing originate, as you say, can bear the absolute hand of the Unoriginate.<sup>9</sup>

What, then, as a consequence of this view, must be said of the nature of the Son? If the Creation is 'of one God, who uses His proper Word as a Hand', then of what is that 'Hand' to God? He is, of course, the true and single Word of God, the "very Wisdom of the Father."<sup>10</sup> The concept of His divine generation cannot be verbalized in the analogical terms of human generation, "for God is not as man (i.e., material), nor men as God".<sup>11</sup> Therefore, in the light of all these claims, the Homocousion was brought forth.

It had been objected to by the opponents of Nicaea because it was unscriptural. Athanasius' rejoinder to that was couched in the following words:

--Religiousness is confessed by all to be lawful, even though presented in strange phrases, provided only they are used with a religious view, and a wish to make them the expression of religious thoughts.\*<sup>12</sup>

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\*This must be a true source of comfort to Messr's. Tillich, J.A.T. Robinson, et. al., although I don't know about that 'religious' business.

The Homocousion was useful, if not strictly necessary, Athanasius affirmed, because by its employment

--we might believe the Word to be other than the nature of things originate (i.e., creatures), being alone truly from God.<sup>13</sup>

Also it was to be preferred to the category of 'likeness' (Cf. Expositio Fidei, pp. 69 and 70) because

--bodies which are like each other may be separated and become at distance from each other, \_\_\_\_.<sup>14</sup>

And Athanasius finally went this far in spelling out its significance:

--He and the Father are one, as He has said Himself, and the Word is ever in the Father and the Father in the Word.<sup>15</sup>

.....  
--If the Son is Word, Wisdom, Image of the Father, Radiance, He must in all reason be One in essence<sup>16</sup>,

inasmuch, however, as this unity implies only

--the truth and eternity of the essence from which He is begotten.<sup>17</sup>

The De Decretis indicates a marked step forward in the purpose of the developing doctrine of Athanasius. He had elaborated on the issue of Creation and upon what was at stake in a too-hasty conflation of cosmology and theology. And he had attempted to come to terms with the Homocousion, endorsing its use, though not the theory of strictly identifying the essence of the Father's and the Son's persons.

Ad Episcopos Aegypti is reputed to have been written very shortly after the previous treatise, ca. 356. Presumably, it was written in response to Athanasius' expulsion from Alexandria by Syrianus (see Note 3, p. 51) and after the nomination of

George to be his episcopal successor (see p. 51).<sup>18</sup> It contains a warning about a certain creed soon to be circulated for their endorsement.

In this letter, the Son is described as being eternal, "True God", unchangeable, and inalienable "from the essence and eternity of the Father."<sup>19</sup> His creatureliness, of course, is again vigorously denied, and the contention that He is but one of the Godhead's several words is reacted to thusly:

(The Father) is the begetter of One Word, who is the fulness of His Godhead, in whom are the treasures of all knowledge, and ( — ) He is co-existent with His Father, and ( — ) all things were made by Him; \_\_\_\_.<sup>20</sup>

But with regard to the Homoeousion, observe how Athanasius, though defending the action of Nicaea, hedged again:

And as, being Word and Wisdom of the Father, (the Son) has all the attributes of the Father, His eternity, and His unchangeableness, and being like Him in all respects and in all things, and is neither before nor after, but co-existent with the Father, and is the very form of the Godhead, and is the Creator, and is not created: (for since He is in essence like the Father, He cannot be a creature, but must be the Creator, \_\_\_\_).<sup>21</sup>

This time, Athanasius had described what necessarily must be assumed was the Homoeousion tenet of the Council he was defending in a manner virtually indistinguishable from the Homoeousion position. This seems strange in the light of his previous rejection of such usage in the De Decretis (see p. 73), and surely it must be attributable to the stance of the readers he anticipated.\*

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\*Or perhaps the De Decretis should really be dated considerably later, perhaps after the 362 Synod at Alexandria (see p. 58).

Between the exile years 356 and 360, Athanasius penned a continuum of Four Discourses Against the Arians.<sup>22</sup> The single, finished product amounts to the high-point of his theological career. In it, he meticulously strove by force of logic and by appeal to Scripture to more fully expatiate upon all of his afore-mentioned assertions. The Son, as always, was maintained to be eternal and increate, the "proper offspring of the Father's essence"<sup>23</sup> (Cf. the discussion of De Decretis, p. 73).

The word Homocousion was not used at all in the first three sections.<sup>24</sup> But it was constantly repeated in the first 'Oration' that the Son "partakes (His own being) from the essence of the Father"<sup>25</sup>:

But this, which is participated, what is it or whence? If it be something external provided by the Father, He will not now be partaker of the Father, but of what is external to Him; and no longer will He be even second after the Father, since He has before Him this other;\_\_\_\_\_ it follows that what is partaken is not external, but from the essence of the Father.<sup>26</sup>

Cardinal Newman and Archibald Robinson (The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, op.cit., see Notes, p. 315, n.6) assume that this notion here truly indicates a claim for the co-essentiality of the persons of the Trinity. I do not agree with this conclusion at all.. The point being discussed was not, strictly-speaking, the matter of substantial identity, but rather the source from which the Son derives His existence. Certainly Athanasius claimed it was 'from the essence of the

Father', but this was to merely restate the position that the Son was 'proper offspring' to the same. I cannot see that such a contention really attests to the nature of the composition of the Son's true essence in any way. The word 'partaken' is tricky, but the rest of the thought is proceeded by the preposition 'from', not 'of'.\*

It is the third of the 'Orations' that unmistakably deals with the idea of essential coinherence. The twenty-eighth chapter is devoted to this theme, and it is interesting to not in this regard Athanasius' exegesis of John 10:30, "I and the Father are One, I in the Father and the Father in me":

(This is) by way of showing the identity of Godhead and the unity of essence. For they are one, not as one thing divided into two parts, and these nothing but one\_\_\_\_, nor as one thing twice named, \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_ (For) if the Son be other, as an Offspring (Cf. preceding paragraph), still, He is the same as God; and He and the Father are one in propriety and peculiarity of nature, and in the identity of the one Godhead, as has been said.<sup>27</sup>

It is in the context of exegeting the same Johannine passage, this time in a refutation of Monarchianism~~sm~~ produced in the fourth 'Oration', that Athanasius first introduces the term Homousion into this work. As far as I can tell, this represents his first specific equation of the concept with the co-essentiality theme:

For if (the Father and the Son were not two persons), (Jesus) would have said 'I am the Father', or 'I and the Father am; but, in fact, in the 'I' He signifies the Son, and in the 'And in the Father', Him

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\*See Athanasius on the theory that 'God' and 'God's essence' are synonymous concepts. De Decretis, op.cit. (see Notes), p. 165.

who begat Him; and in the 'One' the one Godhead and his coessentiality (*ὁμοούσιον*).<sup>28</sup>

Athanasius' adoption of this meaning of the Homousion is certainly a notable event in the history of his theology. But care should be taken not to impute too much significance to the occasion. In both the De Decretis (see pp. ~~73~~ ) and the Ad Episcopos Aegypti (see p. 74), he had demonstrated himself capable of defending the term while imparting to it an entirely different interpretation than this latest one. The real question to be answered is whether his 'Orations' usage represented a genuine development in his doctrine of God or was, rather, a ploy to be used in the implementation of his doctrine of the Church.

His last major work, the De Synodis, provides a clue toward the solution of this question. It was written in 359,<sup>29</sup> the year of the 'Dated Creed' (see p. 54) and the ill-fated councils at Rimini and Seleucia (see pp. 54 and 55). The time of its authorship was colored by the specter of the Homoean settlement which had made strange bed-fellows of the Homousion Party and the Homoeousion Party. The situation was ripe with opportunity for Athanasius.

The De Synodis indicates that the old bishop didn't miss his chance. In a brisk, conciliatory manner he conceded that the whole problem of their dispute was rooted in semantic difficulties:

Those who deny the Council (of Nicaea) altogether, are sufficiently exposed by (the preceding) brief



remarks; those, however, who accept everything else that was defined at Nicaea, and doubt only the Co-essential (*ὁμοούσιον*), must not be treated as enemies; nor do we address them as Ario-maniacs, nor as opponents of the Fathers, but we discuss the matter with them as brothers with brothers, who mean what we mean, and dispute only about the word.<sup>30</sup>

The term, 'Homocousion' -- after all, it was the word produced by the Holy Council -- was suggested as a compromise to include the meanings behind both party's watchwords:

For, while to say 'Like-in-essence' (*ὅμοιούσιον*), does not necessarily convey 'of the essence', on the contrary, to say 'Coessential', is to signify the meaning of both terms, 'Like-in-essence' and 'of the essence'.<sup>31</sup>

Here it is: It was Nicaea and conciliar authority which Athanasius really wanted, not just the working out of a doctrine which conceivably could (and assuredly will) be disputed amongst scholars until time itself runs out. Did he have 'a real doctrinal axe to wield'? Certainly he did, with a two-headed blade. One edge was sharp enough to more than hold its own in the disputations regarding the nature of the Godhead. And the other edge was sharper still, flung to the task of hewing a new path wherein the Church could walk in the straightness of a better-ordered catholicity.

Eight years after Athanasius' death, the sun surely shined on his grave that day the proceedings got under way at Constantinople.

FOOTNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

## FOOTNOTES

### Chapter One - The Origenist Background to the Controversy

<sup>1</sup>R.L. Calhoun, Lectures on the History of Christian Doctrine, Vol. I (New Haven: Yale Divinity School, 3rd Private Printing, 1957), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>3</sup>J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p.74.

<sup>4</sup>Calhoun, Op. cit., p.120.

<sup>5</sup>Kelly, Op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>6</sup>St. Athanasius - Select Writings and Letters, ed. A. Robertson, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. IV, gen. ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), from the "Prolegomena" by A. Robertson, p.xxvi.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. xxvi.

<sup>8</sup>Calhoun, Op. cit., p.123.

<sup>9</sup>G.L. Prestige, God in Patristic Thought (London: S.P.C.K., 1959), p. 38.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>18</sup>Calhoun, Op. cit., pp. 123-24.

<sup>19</sup>Kelly, Op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>20</sup>The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Op. cit., p. xxvi.

- <sup>21</sup>Calhoun, Op. cit., p. 125.
- <sup>22</sup>Kelly, Op. cit., p. 129.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., (citation from De Oratone 15,I), p. 129.
- <sup>24</sup>Origen, Contra Celsum, tr. and notes by H. Chadwick (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1953), pp. 460-461.
- <sup>25</sup>NPNF, Op. cit., p. xxvi.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. xxvi.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. xxvii.
- <sup>28</sup>Christology of the Later Fathers, Vol. III, ed. E.R. Hardy and C.C. Richardson (Philadelphia: The Library of Christian Classics - Westminster Press, 1954), pp. 330-331.
- <sup>29</sup>NPNF, Op. cit., p. xxvii.
- <sup>30</sup>Kelly, Op. cit., p. 140.
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- <sup>57</sup>NPNF, Op. cit., p. xvii.
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- <sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 235.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 236.
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- <sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 239.
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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 250.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

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